



# *Granny's Hands*

**WRITTEN BY  
ERIN O'CONNOR**

Granny's  
Hands

I dedicate Granny's Hands to Ellen Crossen, my deceased Great Grandmother and star of this book. May her selfless service to family and community inspire us all.

Granny's Hands is the quintessential love story: the love between a great grandmother and her 8 years old great granddaughter; the love of farmland and all the animals who live there; the love of family, community, country and roots. In addition, it is an art book. The reader is provided a frame at the end of each chapter...a pallet so he or she may become the illustrator.

A percentage of the proceeds from the sales of Granny's Hands will be donated to A Window Between Worlds, a dedicated nonprofit organization helping victims of domestic violence...  
[www.awbw.org](http://www.awbw.org).

I invite my readers to visit my website...The Eyes of Erin...[www.theeyesoferin.com](http://www.theeyesoferin.com). Find out about all my books and the remarkable charities affiliated with each.

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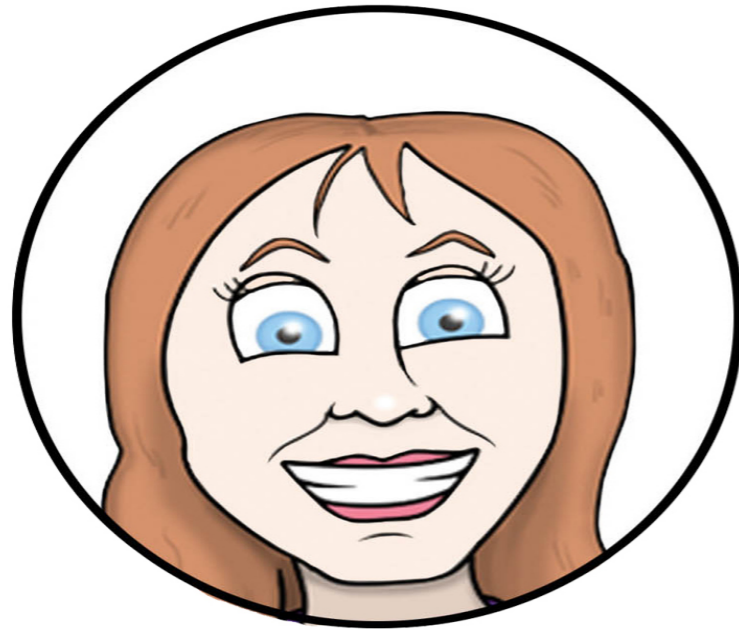
## A MESSAGE TO THE READER

You are about to embark on a summer vacation to Bedford, Iowa with 8 years old Katie Ryan. I am fairly certain you will have as much fun reading GRANNY 'S HANDS as Katie does sharing her story. However, the best thing about this book is that you, the readers, are its illustrators. Every chapter is accompanied by its own frame into which you will draw whatever you believe represents the text of each chapter.

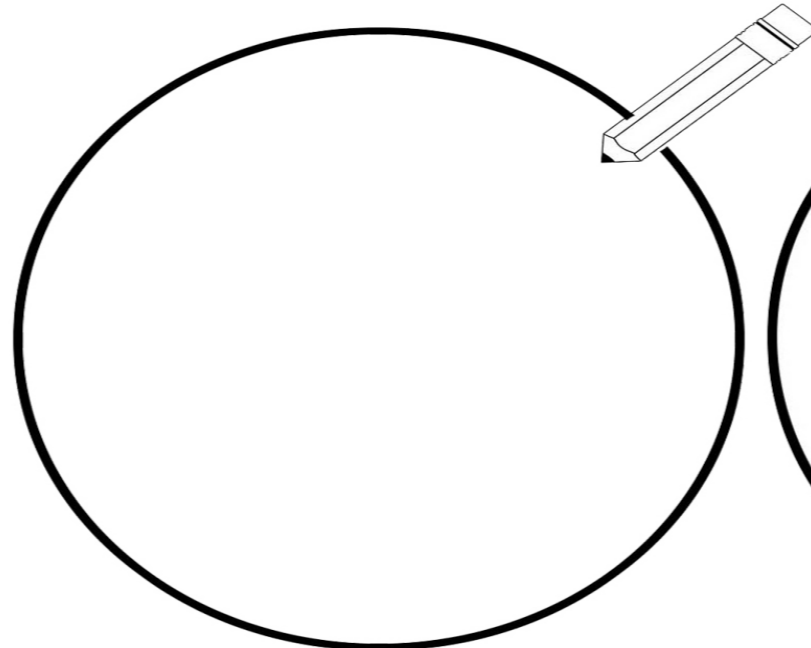
There is no right or wrong in this process so IMAGINE AWAY and don't forget to enjoy yourselves.

Sincerely,  
Your Friend,  
Erin O'Connor





**Author**  
Erin O'Connor



**Reader**  
This book  
belongs to:



**Illustrator**  
Mike Goldstein

# Chapter 1

I am so excited. At this very minute I am flying with Mommy on a big jet airplane. We are going to visit my great grandmother. Granny lives in the heartland of America, in the state of Iowa. She owns a big farm where she has lived for 85 years. Imagine that!

After five hours in the air, we landed in a city called Des Moines, Iowa. As we collected our luggage Mommy and I heard our names being called over a loud speaker.

“Will Lilly and Katie O’Connor please come to passenger pick up in the front lobby.”

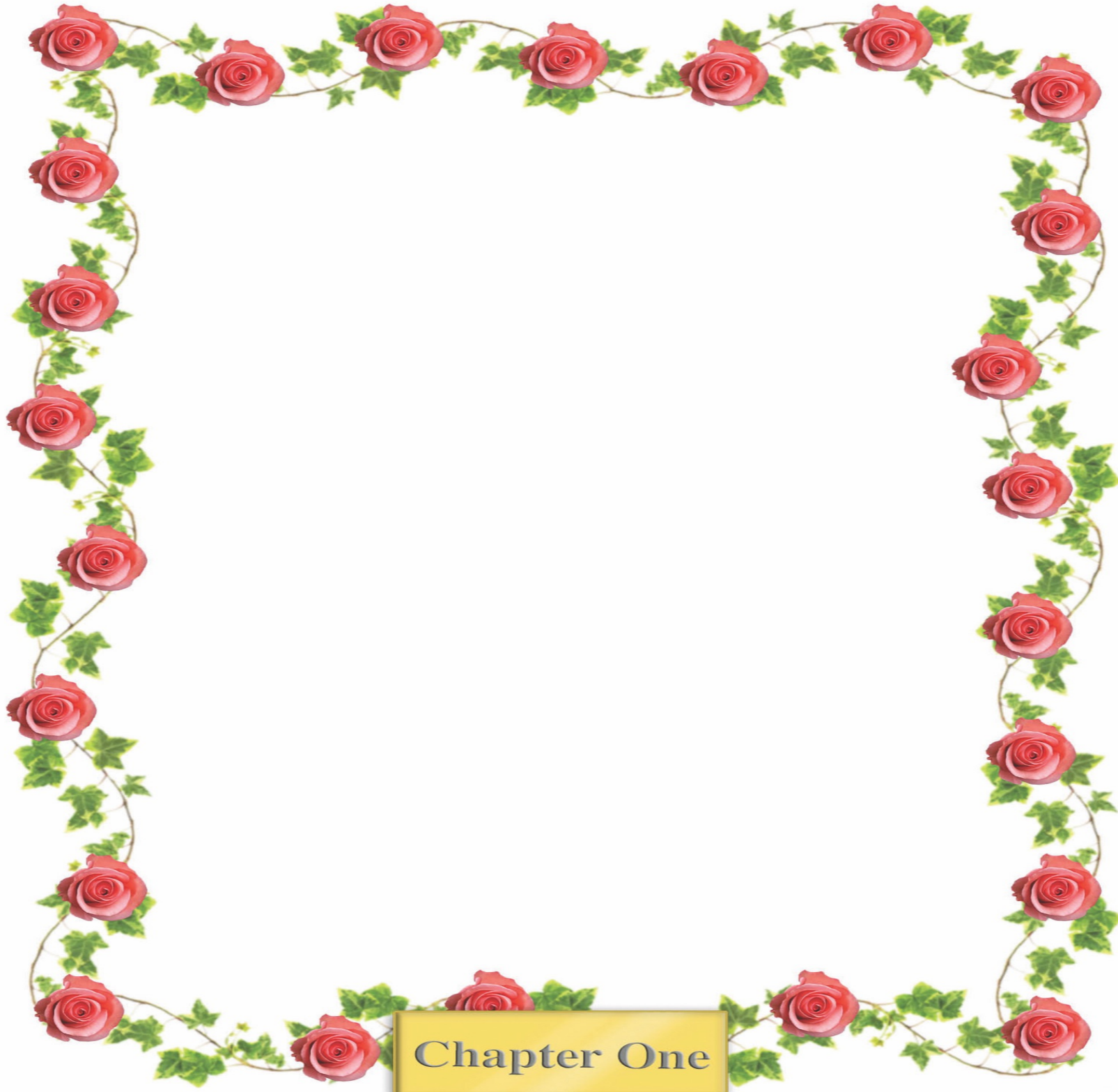
When we reached the lobby we saw a huge sign with our names printed in big red letters. And there, holding the sign was my old granny. When I say old, I mean really old. Her hair was as white as snow, and she had lots of wrinkles, but her eyes were twinkly blue and her smile filled her face. Mommy and I hurried to her and we all came together in a big group hug. Even though I had never met my granny, her hug felt like I had known her forever.

“Lilly, darlin’, it is so grand to see you. And sweet Katie, aren’t you as cute as a wee button!”

Now I don’t know about cute wee buttons, but my granny had an Irish accent and she made it sound like something great.

We all left the airport in Granny’s gigantic car named Annie. Actually, the car was a thirty-year-old Cadillac, which Granny bragged was still running like a fine motorcar.

“My dear old Dad, God rest his soul, left me the car and the farm when he went to meet his maker,” Granny told us as she helped me into the booster chair on the back seat of Annie.



Chapter One

## Chapter 2

While Mommy, Granny and I drove passed wheat fields, cornfields and rolling hills with cows, horses and sheep, we talked and laughed about all sorts of things. Granny was very curious about my day-to-day life...my school, my friends, my hobbies and my pet kitty, Milky. She told me about some of her pets. She told me she couldn't wait for all her animals to meet me.

"They have been expectin' to welcome you for days and can hardly wait to meet you in person!" Granny said.

"How do you know that, Granny?" I asked.

"You don't think Dr. Doolittle is the only one with the gift now, do you Katie?"

Mommy turned around in her seat and gave me a wink and a smile. I decided to play along...

"No of course not...I don't usually tell people this but Milky and I have great conversations every day, Granny!"

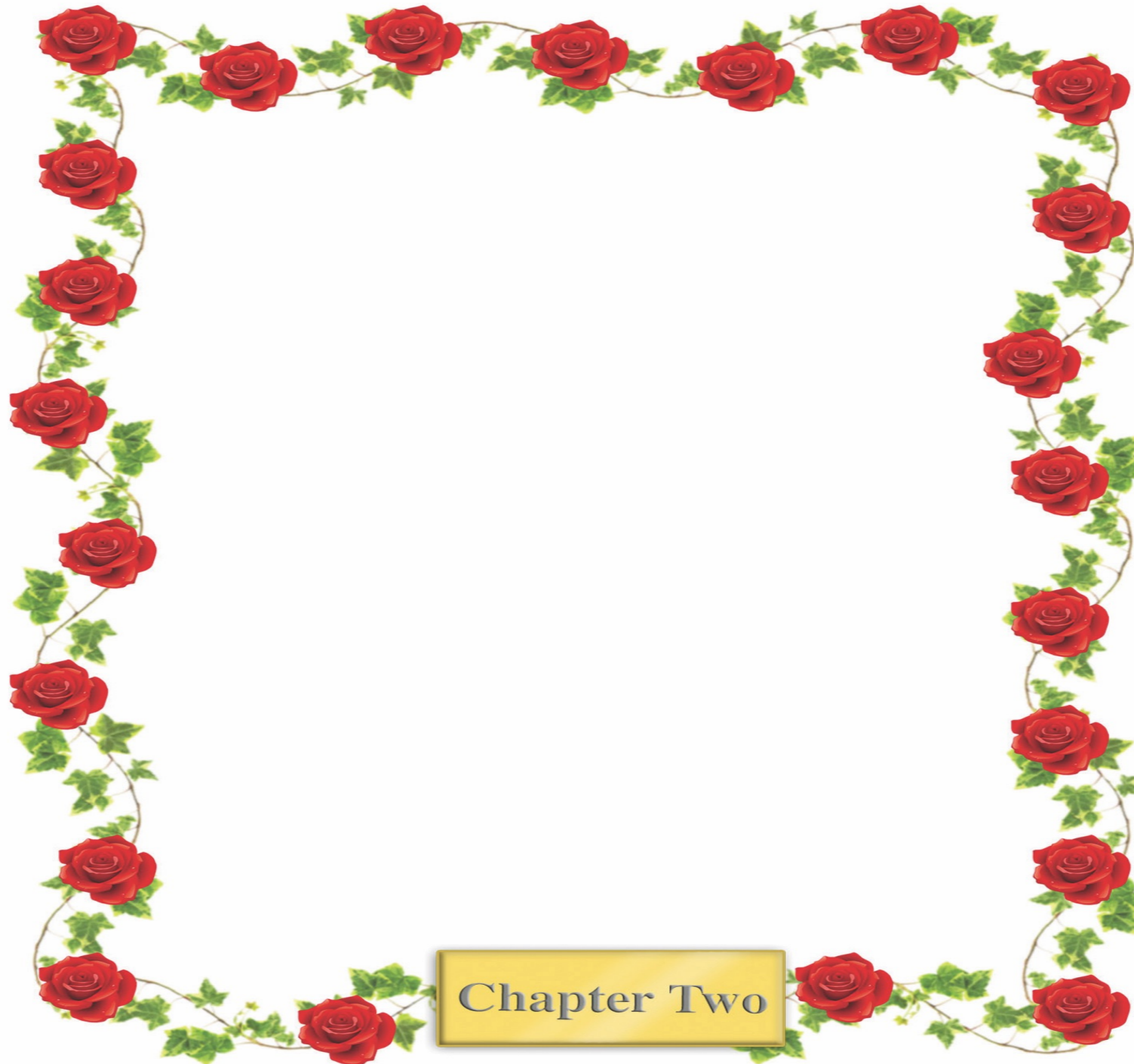
We all laughed at our silliness. It was fun getting to know my granny.

As I gazed out my window, I saw several small towns with lots of space between houses, farms and fields. I felt like I was in a place so different from my home of Manhattan Beach, California. When my family goes for a drive, what I mostly see are lots and lots of houses and buildings. It actually looks like clutter next to the views I was seeing now. Of course, we do have a big blue ocean near my house, but you won't see cows and horses hanging out at the beach any time soon.

Finally, Granny announced in her booming Irish voice, "Home sweet home!" There before me was the grandest farm I have ever seen. As we drove up the super long driveway, we



passed two dogs, three pigs, four horses, chickens and ducks galore, and, in the distance, many cows, sheep and goats. To an animal lover like me, I knew my vacation would be the best ever!



Chapter Two

## Chapter 3

When we climbed out of the car, two awesome Australian Shepherds greeted us. They were named after the princes of England, William and Harry. William had blond and white fur and Harry had red and white fur. They actually chased Annie the entire length of the driveway, which was very far! Then, as we climbed several steps to the front door, two baby kitties meowed. They were super friendly and had come to say hi. They had been resting on the porch, which, by the way, wrapped all around Granny's house. And when Granny opened the big front door, we walked into a world filled with the smells of apples and cinnamon and homemade everything. Delicious!

It was then that I saw them. It was as if I had had the wind knocked out of me. As Granny reached down to pet Lulu, a beautiful white cat with blue eyes, I saw, for the first time, the ugliest, scariest most horrible hands I had ever seen...and they were on my granny! My eyes felt like they were bugging out of my head and I gasped the most shocking sound ever. I was terrified!

"Katie, what's the matter?" My mom asked.

I opened my mouth to speak, but nothing came out. Granny picked up Lulu and handed her to me. "She is something special for sure...that she is!"

Granny thought the noise I had made was about Lulu and how pretty she was and all. She didn't seem to notice how strange I had become as I stared at those hands. But the sweetness of Lulu in my arms soon made me focus on her and I began to feel like myself again. Then Mommy suggested that we go to our room and unpack.

“Yes, yes of course, where are my manners. Just follow me girls and I’ll take you to your grand suite,” Granny told us as she led the way.



### Chapter Three

## Chapter 4

We all went upstairs and Granny opened a door with a beautiful crystal doorknob. My eyes could not believe the splendidness (if there is such a word)! All the furniture was beautiful and very old... The curtains were old, too. They were white lace but in perfect condition. The bedspread had yellow and blue daisies all over it with matching fluffy pillows. There were two matching chairs with footstools covered in the same material! There was a big picture window looking out over the entire farm and the rolling hills beyond. The view seemed like a painting. Granny's land stretched for miles.

"You two get settled in and then gather with me in the kitchen. We'll be havin' chicken and dumplings for dinner, a personal favorite of mine," Granny told me as she swooped Lulu from my arms and hurried out the door.

It was then that my mommy looked at me like mommies do when they know something's up. I felt terrible at what I was about to say and there was no simple way to say it.

"I think Granny is such a great lady and so kind and funny and fun and special...but her hands, mommy, well, they scare me ... really, really scare me. They are frightening! I can't imagine what happened to them. I'm so sorry Mommy."

Mommy got a slight smile on her face like what I had just confessed was not a big deal and I wondered how that could be. She pulled me into her arms (which was a cure for everything).

"You know sweetheart, Granny is very old. She and her hands have been here on planet earth for ninety years...a very long time."

Mommy spoke to me with a quiet calm. I had turned eight on my last birthday and that seemed long. I couldn't really

understand ninety years but I took Mommy's word for it.

"Now let's go downstairs and help Granny with dinner."  
Mommy acted as though all would be fine, but those veiny,  
boney, bumpy, spotted hands kept popping into my mind!



## Chapter Four

## Chapter 5

When we reached the kitchen, Granny was buzzing around doing this and that like she had eaten way too much sugar!

“This kitchen is the heart of the house and my most favorite room,” Granny declared. “This is where all the magic happens!”

Mommy and I took our seats at a huge table with a red and white-checkered tablecloth. This table could fit 12 people if it had to! It was covered with serving dishes filled with the best food I have ever tasted. And guess what? Granny’s old and scary hands had prepared every yummy thing we ate!

After dinner we all cleaned up the kitchen. Granny told me I was a great helper.

“Done in no time at all that’s for sure,” Granny exclaimed as she gave me a big hug with those...I tried not to think the thought.

Chores done, we went out onto the wrap around porch to watch the sunset. The three of us sat together on a big bench swing. Granny’s two Australian Shepherds, William and Harry, ran from the edge of a pasture where the cows were grazing and happily joined us. Jack and Jill, the two black and white kittens who had greeted us earlier, settled down on my lap... (Oh my goodness, did I love this)! We rocked and talked as the sun disappeared in the west and the moon rose in the east ...a moon surrounded by a million diamonds in the sky!



Chapter Five

## Chapter 6

When we went back inside, Granny insisted upon going into the parlor (living room). It was a lovely room that felt so cozy.

Mommy said, “This room is exactly the same as it was when I was a little girl, Katie. Granny, how have you kept everything looking so beautiful?”

“You know, Lilly dear, money still does not grow on trees. I have always kept things clean and neat so they will last forever...or at least for the rest of my lifetime. Now you come here Katie, sit right down next to me on my lovely piano bench and we’ll play the piano together. You’re mommy tells me she’s been teachin’ you to play and you’re brilliant at it.”

Up until this moment I had forgotten all about “those hands.” Now, there was no escaping. I sat down next to my wonderful granny, my heart pounding and my hands shaking. But when she placed her hands on the keys and started to play, I felt calm and peace come over me. Granny’s very old hands made piano playing look easy. I know, however, that playing the piano is super hard. I couldn’t believe that hands that looked so broken could play so great. Soon Mommy, Granny and I were singing, and laughing and taking turns playing our favorite songs. We had a blast!

The next thing I knew the old grandfather clock on the parlor wall began to chime. “Gracious me, and can you believe it’s ten o’clock already? Tomorrow is goin’ to be a very busy day and we all need our beauty sleep,” Granny told us yawning at the same moment.

Then, Granny took my hand into her very old one and led me upstairs. Mommy and I put on our pajamas, brushed our teeth and crawled into the big guest bed together. This was a



real treat for me. I have my own room at home and Mommy and I only sleep together when Daddy's away on business. This giant bed felt like a cloud! As soon as my head hit the pillow, I fell into a deep and dreamy sleep.



## Chapter Six

## Chapter 7

The crow of a rooster awakened me early the next morning. Mommy slept through that noise and the noise I made as I got out of bed, dressed and hurried down stairs. I followed the sounds of pots and pans rattling and found Granny, Lulu, William and Harry, Jack and Jill and an old orange cat named Joe in the kitchen.

“Good morning Katie darlin’. Did Freddie wake you up?”

“If you mean a crowing rooster, then yes but Mommy is still sound asleep.”

Winking, Granny said, “ We better be gettin’ to the morning chores! There is always work to be done.”

After feeding our furry friends in the kitchen, Granny and I went outside. Chickens, Freddie the rooster and various ducks soon surrounded us. Granny gave me some bird food and told me to start tossing.

“ It’s like throwin’ a Frisbee...it’s all in the wrist. Be quick though or these crazy birds will start peckin’ at ya.”

I tried my best to keep up with her, but Granny’s hands had mine beat by far. For some reason I started laughing, which made Granny laugh too. It was so funny trying to feed these birds, which kept charging us. Granny called them bottomless pits!

As soon as that chore was finished, Granny took my hand and led me to the chicken coop.

“Well isn’t this a sight for sore eyes, Katie.”

As I looked around I saw several eggs left by some of the chickens.

“T’will be a feast at breakfast today,” Granny said.

I watched carefully as Granny picked up one egg (ever so

gently) and placed it carefully into a basket made just for this purpose. I went from nest to nest and did exactly as Granny had done. I was beginning to feel more and more comfortable around her old and expert hands.



## Chapter Seven

## Chapter 8

Back in the kitchen, Granny and I made the best breakfast... ever. While she fried the bacon, I made the pancakes (Daddy and I make breakfast every Sunday so this wasn't new to me).

"Why Katie, you cook those cakes like a professional. It is truly somethin' grand havin' you here with me!"

"Um, whatever you girls are up to smells marvelous," Mommy said as she came to join us.

We all sat down to a breakfast fit for the farm girls we were. Just as we finished eating there came a knock on the back door and in came a pretty woman as tall as Daddy (six feet at least).

"Good morning Granny," this tall woman said in a booming voice as she embraced her. Then she went over to my mommy and the two of them hugged like long lost sisters. Then it was my turn. She came over to me and, lifting me out of my seat, swung me around and around until I was a dizzy mess.

I had heard all about Sara for years. My mommy had spoken many times about their childhood adventures on the farm. Granny had adopted Sara when she was a baby (Sara's first year of life is a sad story which I won't discuss right now). The point is, my mommy spent every summer on the farm with her mom, (my Grandma Mary), Granny and Sara and they all will admit that they were very lucky to have shared those times together.

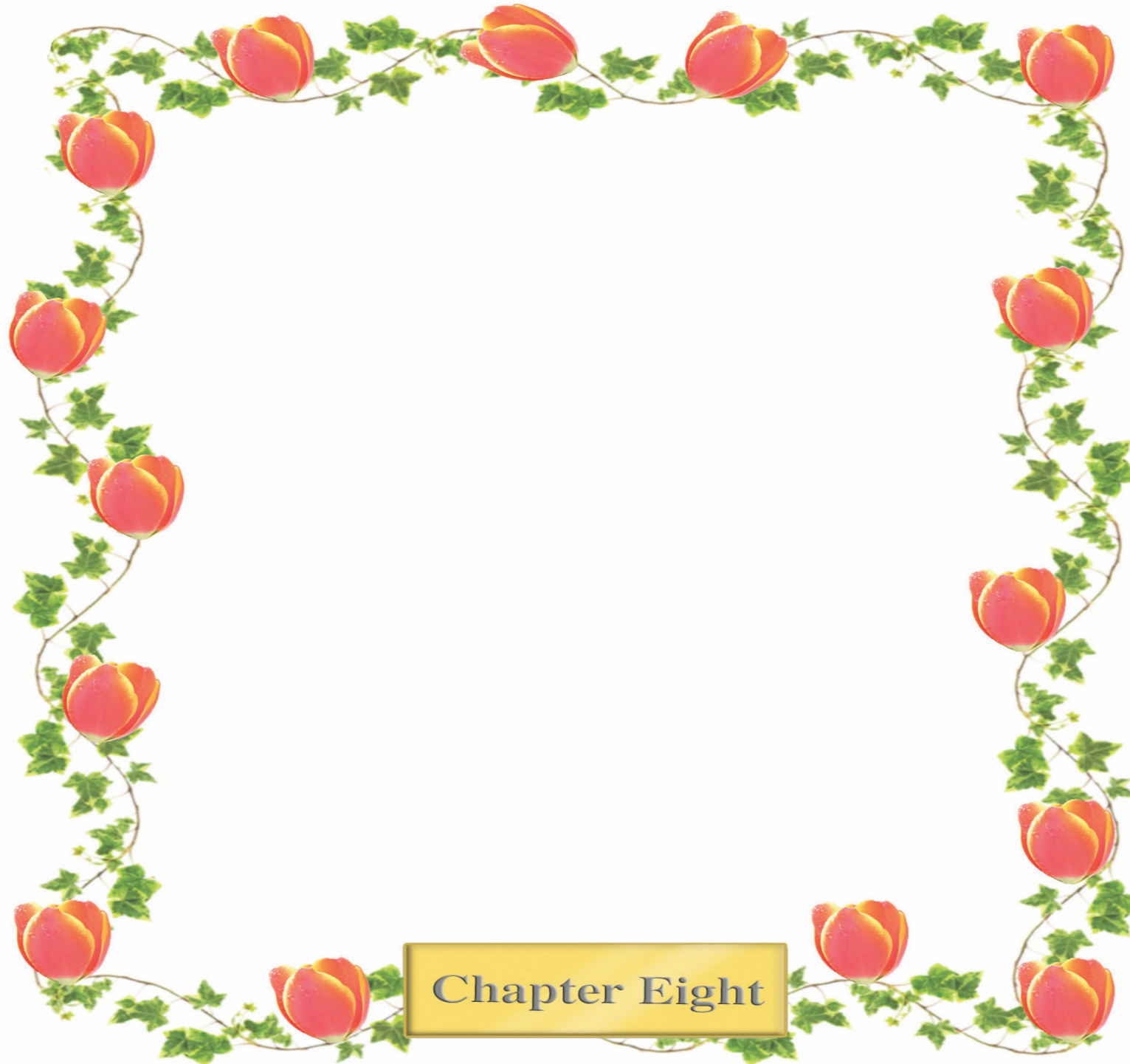
A loud knock on the back door announced another visitor.

"Ernie!" Mommy shrieked with joy at the sight of him.

Soon my mom was hugging a man who was, believe it or not, a tiny bit shorter than I ...and I'm only 4 feet 2 inches...

"Well you and Katie have gotten here just in time," Ernie

said as he patted my head. “ It looks like Lizzie is about to drop her foal, Miss Granny!”



## Chapter Eight

## Chapter 9

Granny and Sara hurried out the door with Mommy and me close behind and Ernie right behind us. When we reached the barn we found stalls that held four of the most beautiful horses I have ever seen. In the last stall was Lizzie, a brown and white filly. On the center of her forehead was a mark that looked like a star. She was standing there, making a moaning sound. She startled me at first. Sara suggested that I might be too young for what was about to happen but I begged her to let me stay. After all, when I was only five, I had helped a stray cat named Betsy give birth to her three kittens. I reminded my mommy of this. Granny then said, to my surprise,

“Lilly, dear, Katie is a farm girl. It’s in her blood. I do believe she should stay.”

Hurray for my old granny!

And so it was, that on this 22nd day of June, 2012, I helped Lizzie with the birth of her son, Toby, a sweet and precious baby foal. I forgot to mention that Sara was one of Bedford Iowa’s finest veterinarians. During her childhood on this very farm she had helped Granny bring many different animals into this world. Sara knew all about the magic of Granny’s hands. They were quite a team and it was lucky she was with us for Toby’s debut.

Although there had been some complications, Sara had given Lizzie a dose of some powerful medicine, which had helped her a lot! Granny told me to stand outside the stall up on the rung of the gate. She told me to sing softly to Lizzie. As I sang “The Mockingbird Song” as sweetly and calmly as I could, Sara and my granny caught the handsome baby foal as he dropped out of Lizzie.

Granny said, with a big grin on her face, “Why my dear little Katie, you take to birthing like a duck to water.” Sara agreed and mommy smothered me with kisses. I can’t remember ever feeling so happy and so proud!



## Chapter Nine

## Chapter 10

Granny, Mommy, Sara, Ernie and I spent the next hour cheering Toby on. He struggled mightily to stand. His legs were like skinny twigs but somehow, after many tries, they held him up. We all clapped and cheered. I swear I saw a smile on Lizzie's proud "mommy face" as she gazed with big brown eyes at her Toby. Granny kept saying, "Isn't Mother Nature grand!"

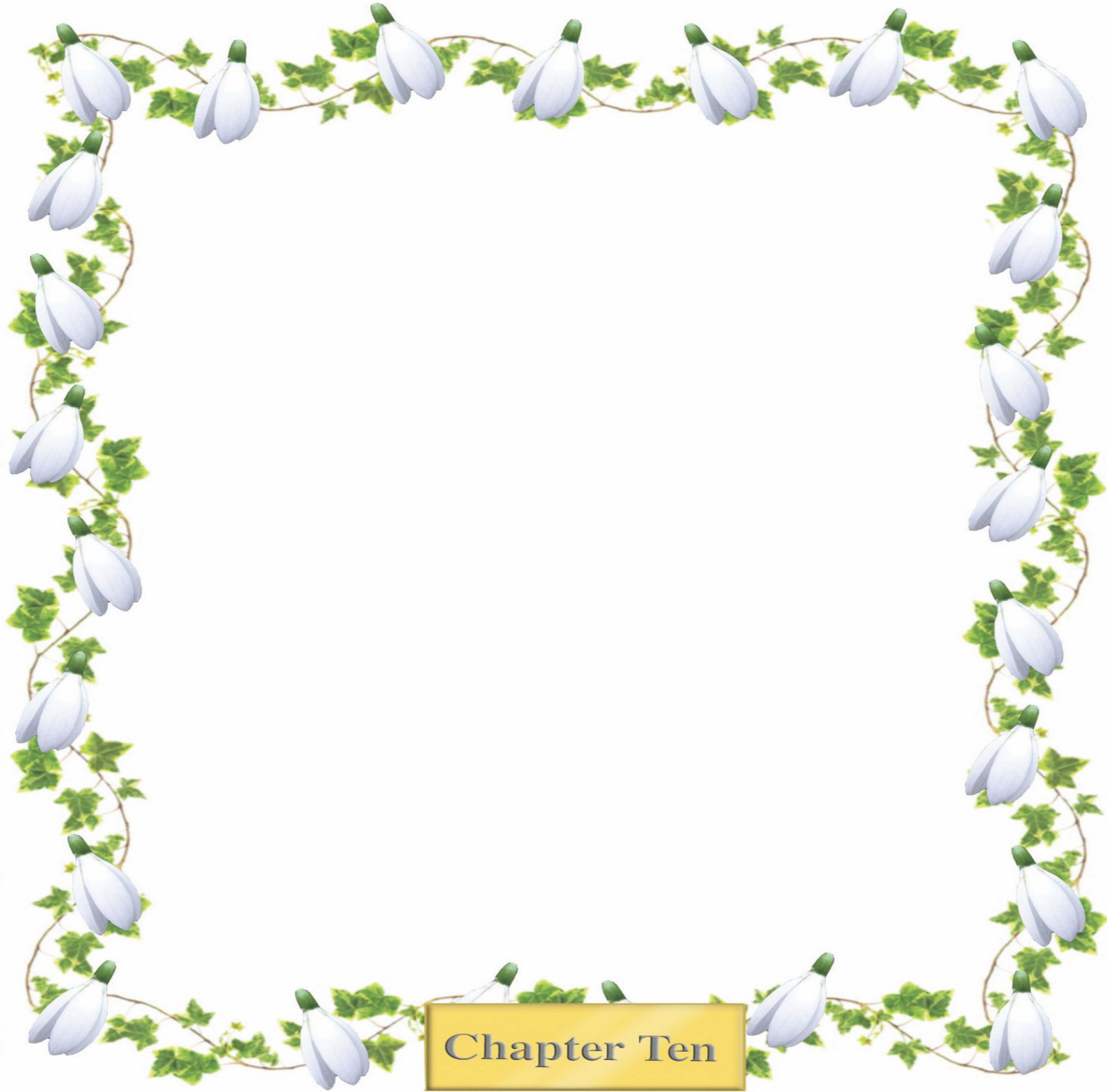
For the rest of the afternoon I watched Lizzie and Toby bond and fell in love with everything about being a farm girl. Soon, Sara left (she had to go to work).

Then, Granny said, "Well my dears, it would be heavenly to spend all day with mother and son, but I'm afraid I must be gettin' to the bakin' for the Bazaar on Sunday."

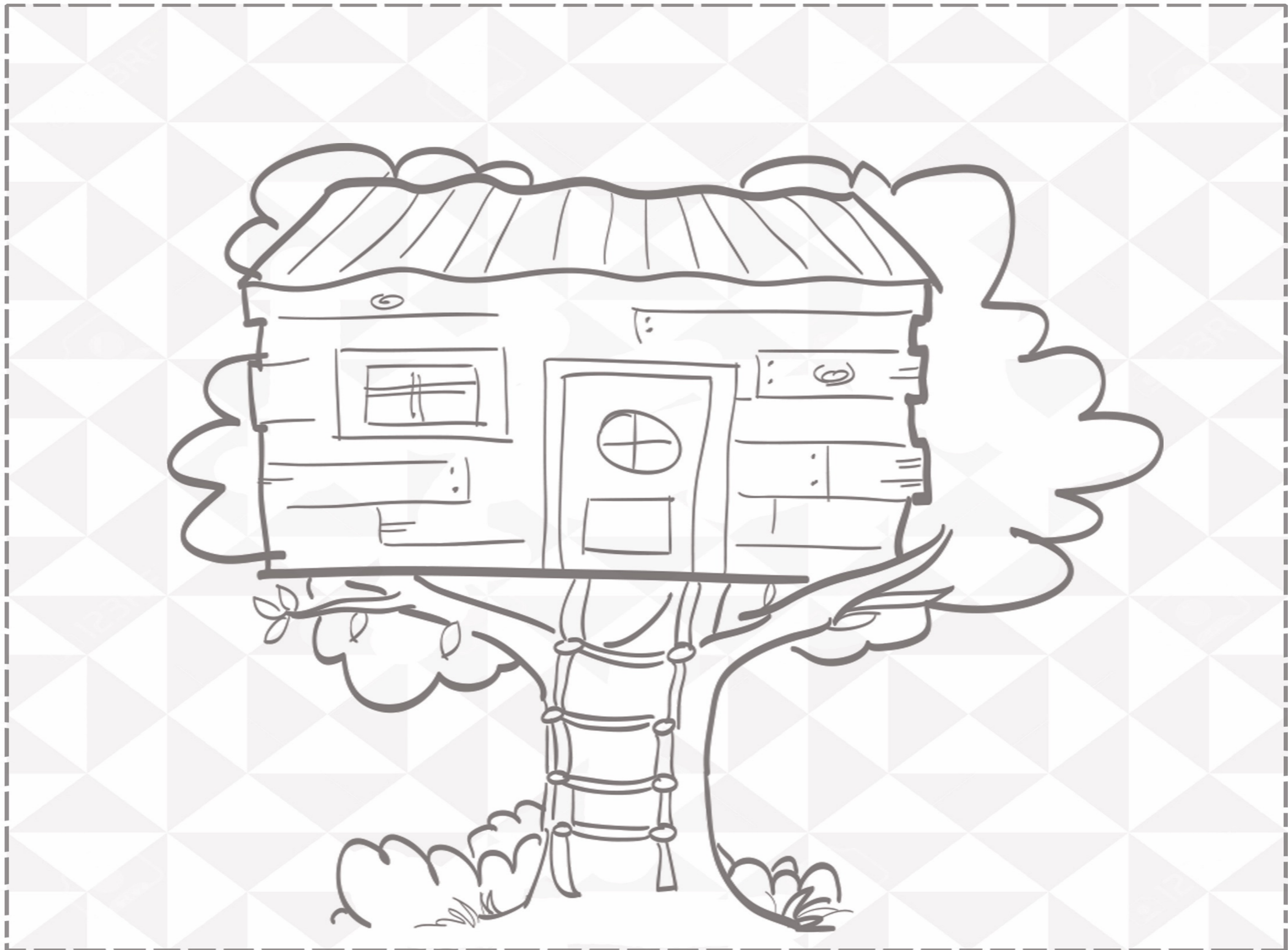
Granny was talking about a really big fundraiser held every year in the town of Bedford. All the money that was raised at the Bazaar was used to help all the needy and down-on-their-luck townspeople. Granny always brought in the most money with her pies and her quilted blankets.

Mommy said she would help Granny and wanted me to help too, but I begged them to let me stay with Ernie and help with Lizzie and Toby. We all agreed that I could help bake pies tomorrow. As Mommy and Granny disappeared into the kitchen, Ernie and I opened Lizzie's stall gate. We watched as she led the way to the corral, Toby wobbling right behind her...so cute.





Chapter Ten



## Chapter 11

I couldn't believe it was dinnertime when Mommy called me in for supper. Toby had become quite the expert trotting around the corral. He was definitely showing off for Ernie and me. I really hated to leave this fun but I was feeling super hungry. When I reached the kitchen I was so happy to see that my mommy had cooked up her specialty...spaghetti with meatballs and a fresh green salad.

Mommy invited Ernie to stay and eat with us. We all stuffed ourselves and I think Granny ate more than anyone. Ernie stayed and helped us clean up the kitchen. Mommy and Granny had managed to bake twelve pies that afternoon and they were all lined up on the windowsill above the sink. They had made apple, blueberry and cherry and I don't know which pie looked or smelled the best.

After Ernie left to put Lizzie and Toby back in their stall, Granny, Mommy and I went onto the porch. We sat together on the bench swing and watched the sky change from dusk to dark. However, we were all pretty tired and decided to skip the piano playing and go straight to bed.

Just as Mommy and I were crawling into our cozy bed, Daddy called on Mommy's cell. To tell you the truth, I had forgotten all about him and was so happy to hear his voice when Mommy put him on speaker.

"You can't believe my day Daddy!"

I began telling him all about Toby and everything else I was doing. I told him all about Granny and her fantastic ways.

"It all sounds great...I'm so jealous...I wish I could be with you!"

It made me sad to know he missed us...Suddenly I missed

him, too.

“Come, Daddy. Just hop on an airplane...come tomorrow!” I told him excitedly.

“From your mouth to God’s ears, baby.” This is my dad’s favorite expression and it actually means as much as he would like to, it’s not going to happen.

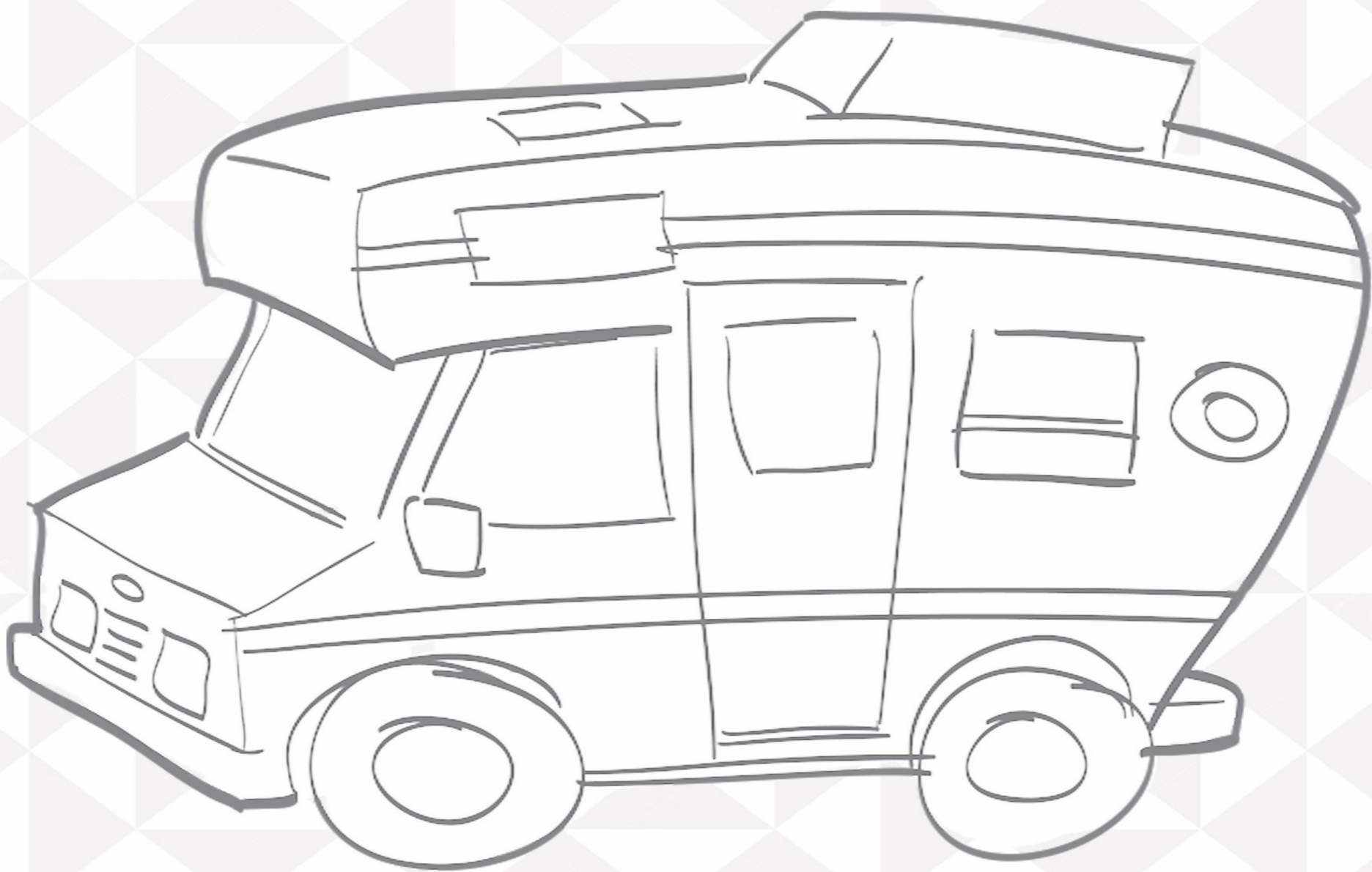
“Sweet dreams cupcake...now let me say goodnight to Mommy.”

I went to hand the phone back to my mom, but she was sound asleep. Daddy told me not to wake her and then he sent me a giant hug and a kiss over the phone like he always does when we’re apart. I really love my daddy and would miss him more if I weren’t having such a great vacation. I am a very lucky girl!





Chapter Eleven



## Chapter 12

I woke up to Freddie's crowing the next morning and saw that Mommy was already up. I dressed and hurried down the stairs. There was lots of laughter going on in the kitchen. Even though it was just six a.m. Ernie, Sara, Granny and Mommy were busy baking more pies. A new face was among them and Sara greeted me saying, "Katie, meet your cousin Finn."

Finn was a friendly sort. He came towards me extending his hand and then drew me in for a hug.

"So this is my kissin' cousin Katie. Mom says you are my pie-making partner. Let's get busy. We have lots of catching up to do."

"Now Finn, sure and you know this isn't a competition. It's a team effort it is!" Granny put her wrinkly old hands around both of us at the same time as she spoke.

"Don't you worry, Katie darlin'. Come get your apron and I'll show you how we make glorious pies."

After Granny showed me how to make pie dough from scratch, (not from a box), she gave me my own rolling pin and tried to teach me how to turn a ball of dough into perfect crust. Granny's hands worked as though they had their own brain. Finn couldn't stop laughing at my hands, though, as they tried and tried to get crust-making right.

By 3:00 in the afternoon Finn and I had managed to make five pies of our own. All together the team had 40 pies to sell at Bedford's Bazaar the next day. Ernie and Sara placed them in boxes while Granny, Mommy and I made sandwiches for a late lunch.

"Granny, can Katie and I eat in the tree house?" Finn asked.

“Well, now, doesn’t that sound like a grand idea? Would you like that, Katie? I can make the two of you a picnic basket with plenty of food to fill ya,” Granny told me as she disappeared into a gigantic room she called her pantry.

She retrieved the basket before I had a chance to object.

It’s not that I didn’t like Finn. He was a happy ten-year-old boy and we had had fun so far. Mommy and Sara thought that a picnic in the tree house was a great idea. They used to do it all the time when they were kids. So it was settled. Finn grabbed the basket once it was perfectly packed by those fantastic yet still ugly hands on my granny. Then, off we went to see the farm from on high...inside Mommy and Sara’s childhood tree house.

Once we had reached the front porch, Finn pointed to our destination, which seemed awfully far away. But, suddenly Granny appeared driving a golf cart.

“Hop on you two. I believe I’m goin’ your way.”

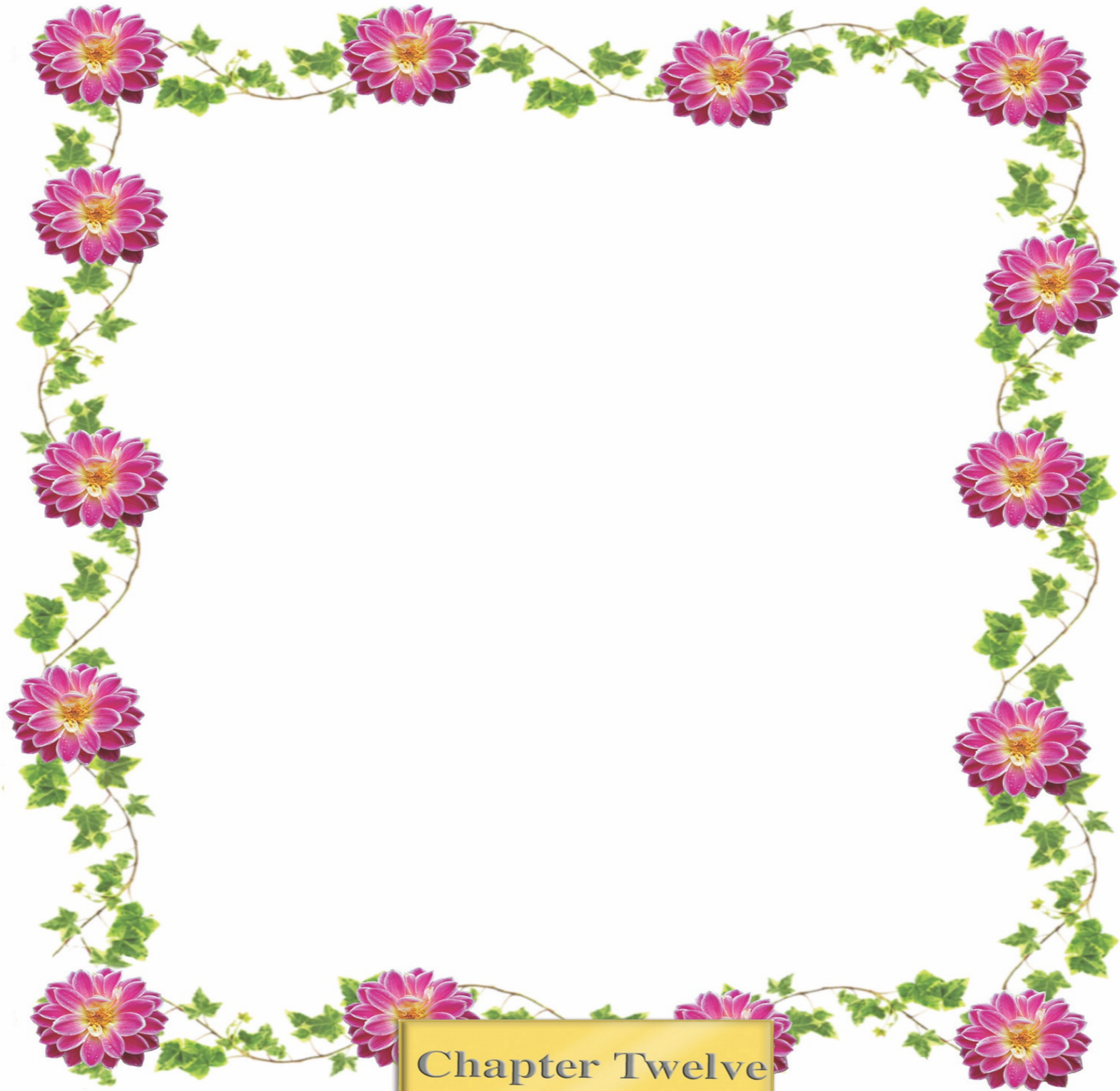
Granny drove very fast across the front yard and two fields. I held on for dear life while Finn yelled, “Faster, faster,” and Granny laughed her head off. Fortunately, we reached the old oak tree in one piece. Finn and I climbed off the cart, basket in hand.

“You mischief makers be back by sunset. Take good care of Katie, now, won’t you Finn?”

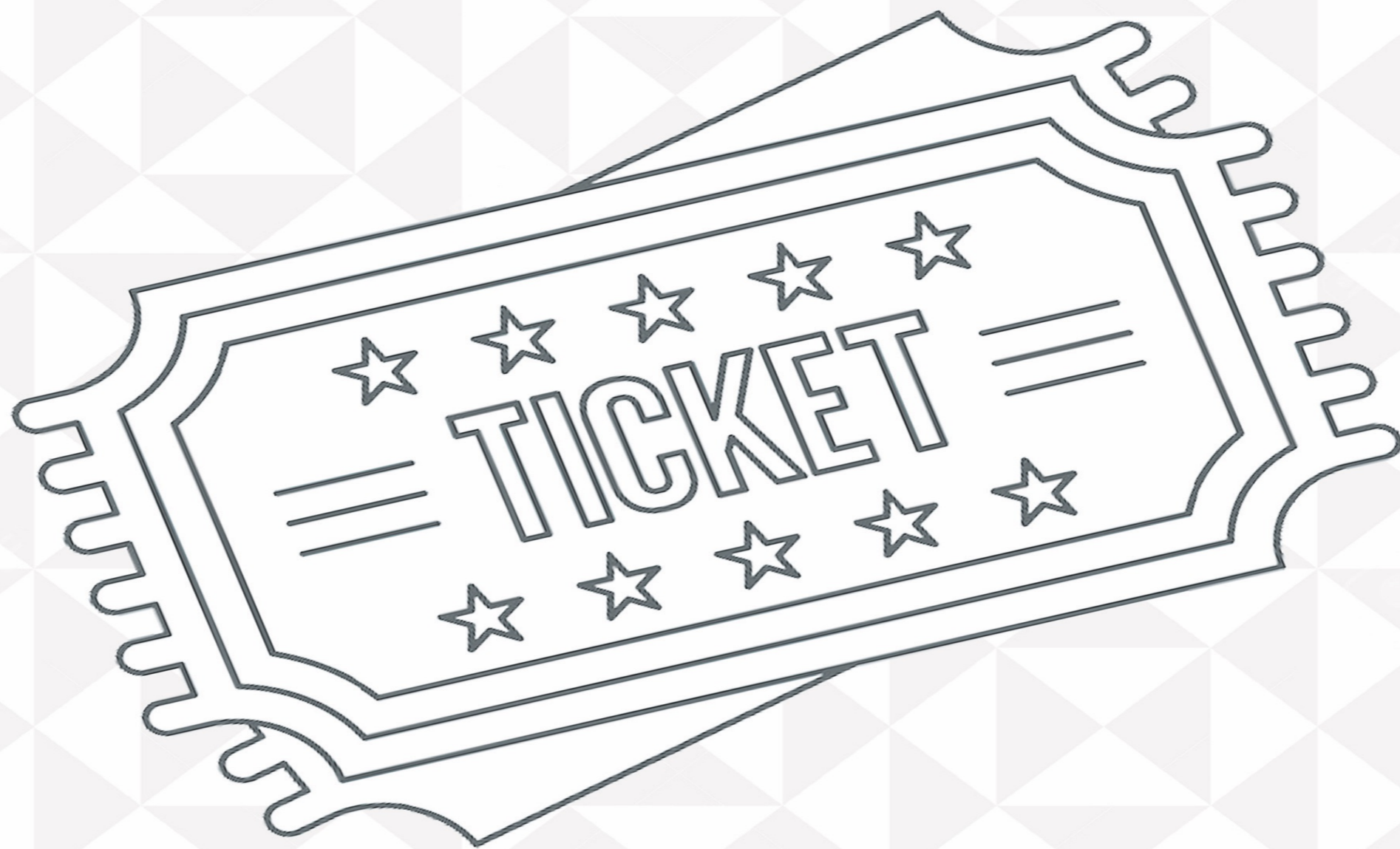
“You know I will Granny.”

Before I could assure my granny that I could totally take care of myself, she was gone in a swirl of dust, her bumpy hand waving in the air.





Chapter Twelve



## Chapter 13

Finn and I covered our faces with our hands so we wouldn't choke to death as we laughed at our funny Granny. Leaving the basket on the ground, Finn started up a rope ladder... the only way to the tree house. Once inside he lowered a big box on pulleys. When it reached me, I put the picnic basket in it. After that, Finn pulled the box back up and into the tree house.

“Your turn, Katie. Come on up.”

I must admit I was a little afraid. The rope ladder was really wobbly but I didn't want Finn to think I was chicken. As I climbed I counted each rung of the ladder, trying to concentrate on what I was doing. Finally I reached the door of the tree house after rung sixteen.

Finn had paid zero attention to me as I climbed the ladder. He was setting a little table with our lunch when I reached the house in the tree. I entered into the cutest miniature living room...ever! There were three big windows with home-made plaid curtains. Each window presented a beautiful view of Granny's farm and beyond. Besides the little table where my lunch awaited, there were two little wooden chairs, a cozy little red couch and a pretty little red and blue rug.

“What took you so long?” Finn joked.

His mouth was stuffed with his sandwich and soon my mouth was too. We didn't speak for a while. We ate and stared out the windows. From the first window I could see beautiful cows in a field of short grass. They were calmly and quietly grazing. There were two baby cows as well. I also saw several sheep with three baby sheep clinging to their mothers.

From the second window the view was of a huge field of

big green stalks swaying in the afternoon breeze.

“Those are ears of corn,” Finn told me, reading my thoughts. “It’s really fun to get lost in the maze of it. Sometime this week I’ll show you.”

“How do you find your way out? It looks impossible from up here.”

“Truthfully, it’s not all that easy but I have my ways...you’ll see.” But I knew I would not be doing that...for sure!

The third window presented the cutest sight of all. Granny was the proud owner of micro pigs. These are miniature pigs from England. They were eating from two buckets, which Ernie was filling with special food.

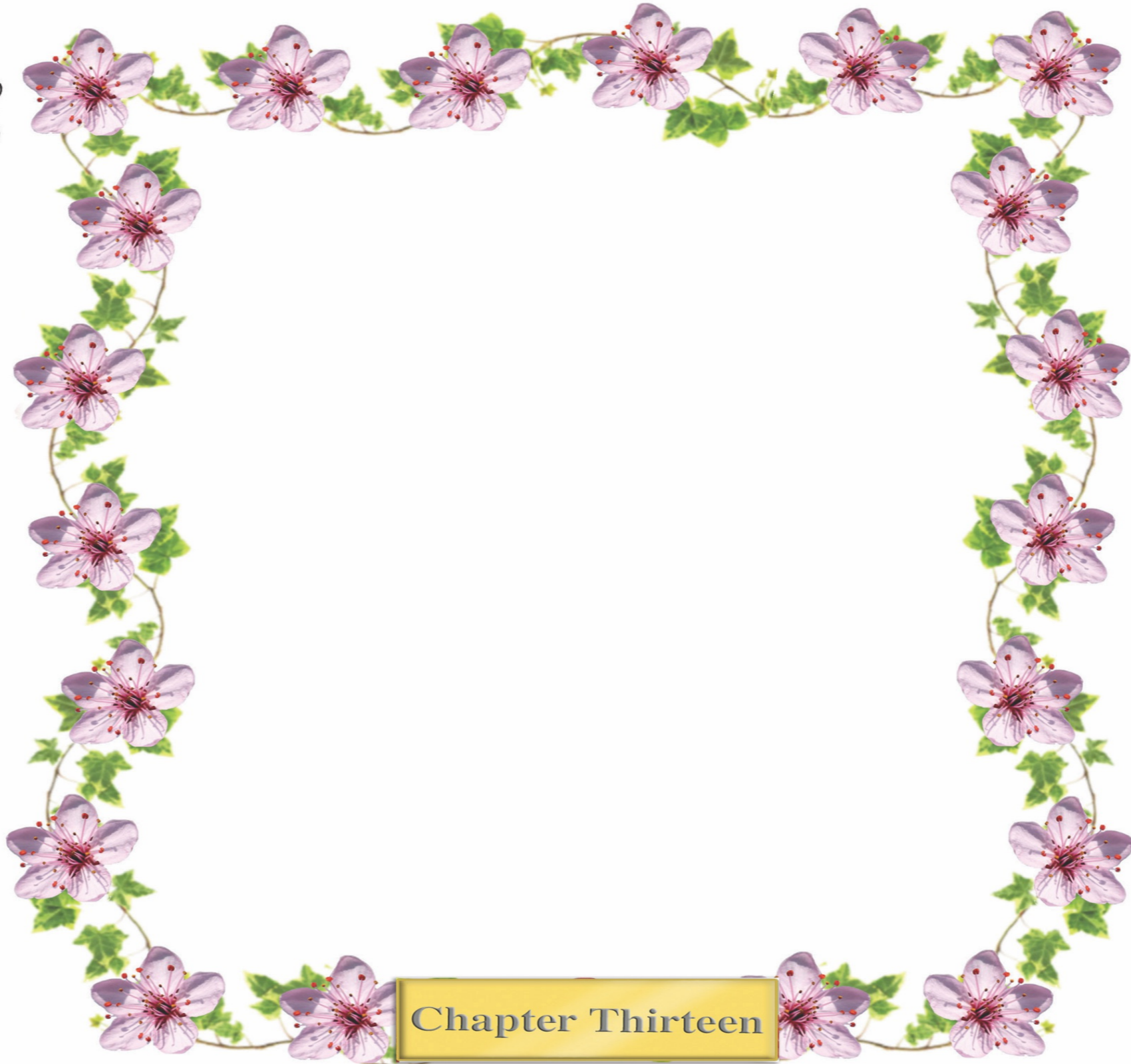
“The pigs are my favorites,” Finn said. “They are smarter than dogs and you can teach them to do all sorts of tricks.”

“Really! That sounds like so much fun. Show me Finn. I want to go meet the little pigs.”

Finn seemed just as anxious as I was to go join Ernie in the pigs’ poke. We wasted no time putting the basket back in the box with the pulleys and lowering it back to the ground. The next thing I knew, Finn had hustled down the rope ladder and was yelling at me.

“Hurry up slow poke.” He demanded impatiently.

I took a deep breath and started counting my way back down the ladder as I had on my way up. When my feet reached the ground Finn egged me on with, “Race you!”



**Chapter Thirteen**

## Chapter 14

Finn took off running. He had no idea I was an expert runner and soon we were neck and neck. When we reached Ernie and the pigs we were both laughing and panting at the same time. Seeing the three little pigs up close brought me to my knees!

“Oh my...,” I stammered. “They are adorable! What are their names?” Ernie opened the gate and we went into the pigs’ poke.

“The white one with the black markings is Huey and the black one with white markings is Luey. The solid white one in the middle is Suzy. She may be the smallest and the only female, but she’s the toughest...and she is very smart.” Ernie spoke like a proud Dad.

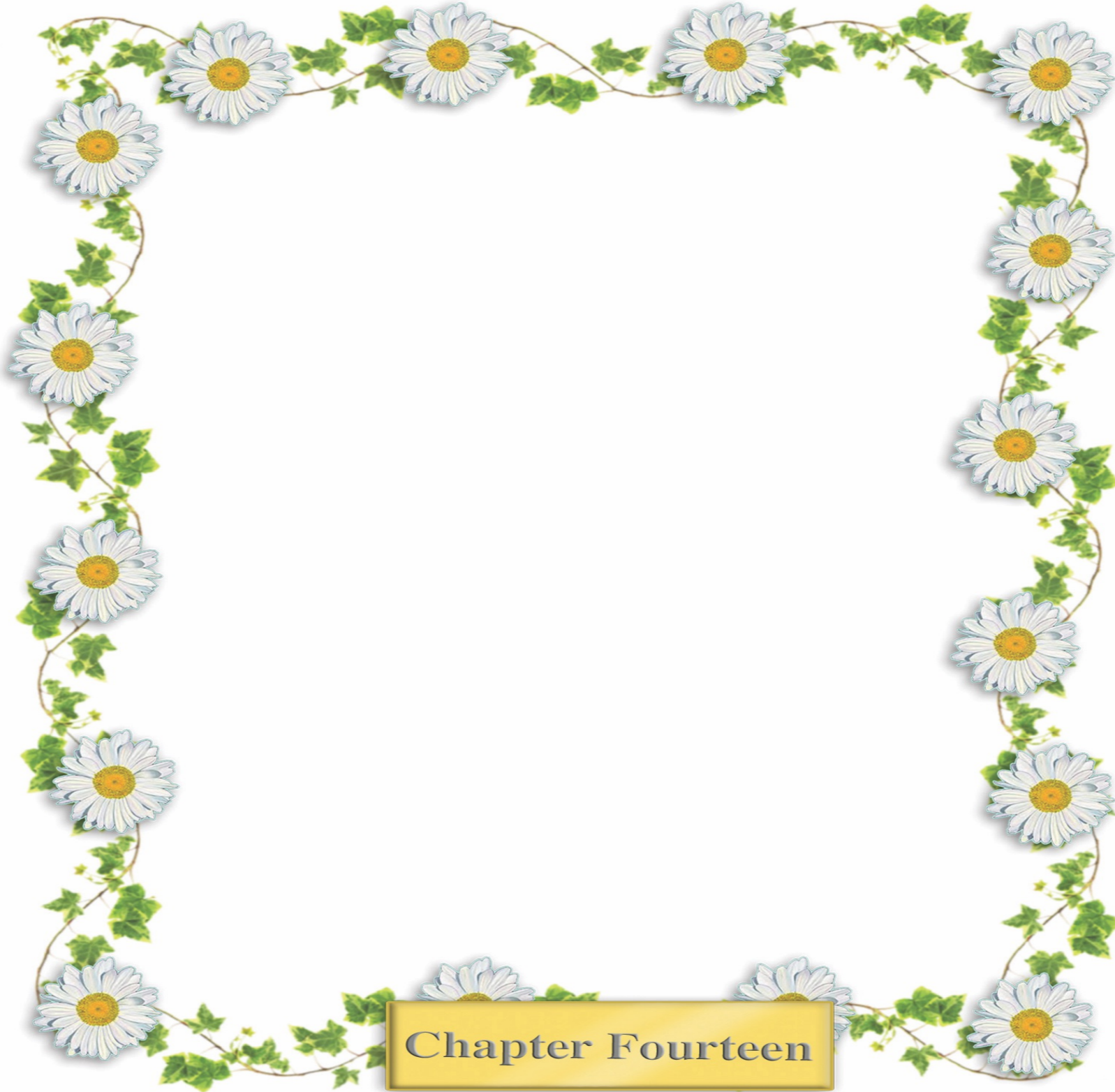
“That’s true, Katie. Watch this.”

Finn started giving Suzy different commands like sit, roll over, high five, count to three and so on. Then he told all the pigs to give him kisses and each one came to him and did so.

“I want kisses. Me next, please.”

When Finn told them to give me kisses I squatted down so they could reach me. One by one, each piglet greeted me with soft loving kisses. It made me feel warm all over.

“You two are in charge because I promised your granny I’d help her label the pie boxes for the sale tomorrow. Make sure you lock the gate when you leave,” Ernie told us as he hurried off toward the house.



Chapter Fourteen

## Chapter 15

Unfortunately, we could only play a few more minutes. The sun was going to set soon so we said goodbye to Huey, Luey, and Suzy. I grabbed the picnic basket and Finn and I hurried off toward the house. On our way we stopped to say hi to Lizzie and Toby and found Granny brushing Lizzie and talking to both horses. Of course, like always, Granny's expert hands were gliding and sliding the brush across Lizzie's beautiful, shiny coat.

“Would the two of you like to help with the brushin' of my very special four footed friends?” Granny asked.

“Yes, please, Granny,” I said excitedly.

“Well, come here then and I'll be teachin' you the art of brushin'. You and Toby will be sharin' this first experience together. Finn, grab that extra brush and finish up with Lizzie won't ya now?” Granny asked.

While Finn worked on Lizzie, Granny and I brushed Toby. At first he seemed nervous and it was hard for me to get the feel. Granny was such a good teacher, though. She placed the brush in my left hand because I am left-handed and put her spotty bumpy old left hand on top of mine. Granny spoke quietly as we worked.

“The art of brushin' is like a dance. There's a rhythm to it. Now don't you be thinkin' about a thing...just feel the rhythm of our hands.”

Then Granny and I danced all over Toby's body while he surrendered willingly to his and my first brushing.





**Chapter Fifteen**



**GRANNY'S  
PIES**

## Chapter 16

We had just finished grooming the horses when we noticed a large truck turning onto Granny's driveway.

"Now who do you think might be comin' up my drive so late in the day? Sure and I'm not expectin' anyone," Granny said, eyeing the vehicle with some suspicion.

"It's a house on wheels, Granny!" I could see this clearly as it got closer.

"It's an R.V, not a house on wheels," Finn said with a tone of voice that made fun of me.

"Now Finn, if Katie wants to be callin' a recreation vehicle a house on wheels, well then, she certainly can," Granny defended me.

By then the R.V. was halfway up the drive. I could see my daddy in the driver's seat. "It's Daddy, Granny! Finn, my daddy's here," and I ran to meet him.

Mommy had seen the sight from the kitchen window at that same moment. She was just as surprised and happy as I. Daddy stopped the R.V and opened the big front door just as Mommy and I reached the most amazing house on wheels I had ever seen.

"Well Great Saints alive!" Granny exclaimed while Mommy and I showered Daddy with kisses and hugs.

"Surprise!" Daddy said to one and all.

"You guys were having so much fun, I didn't want to miss out on one more day... so here I am. And Granny you haven't changed one bit since the last time we met. Gosh, I can't believe it's been ten years already."

"You are still full of the blarney, Steven O'Reilly," Granny

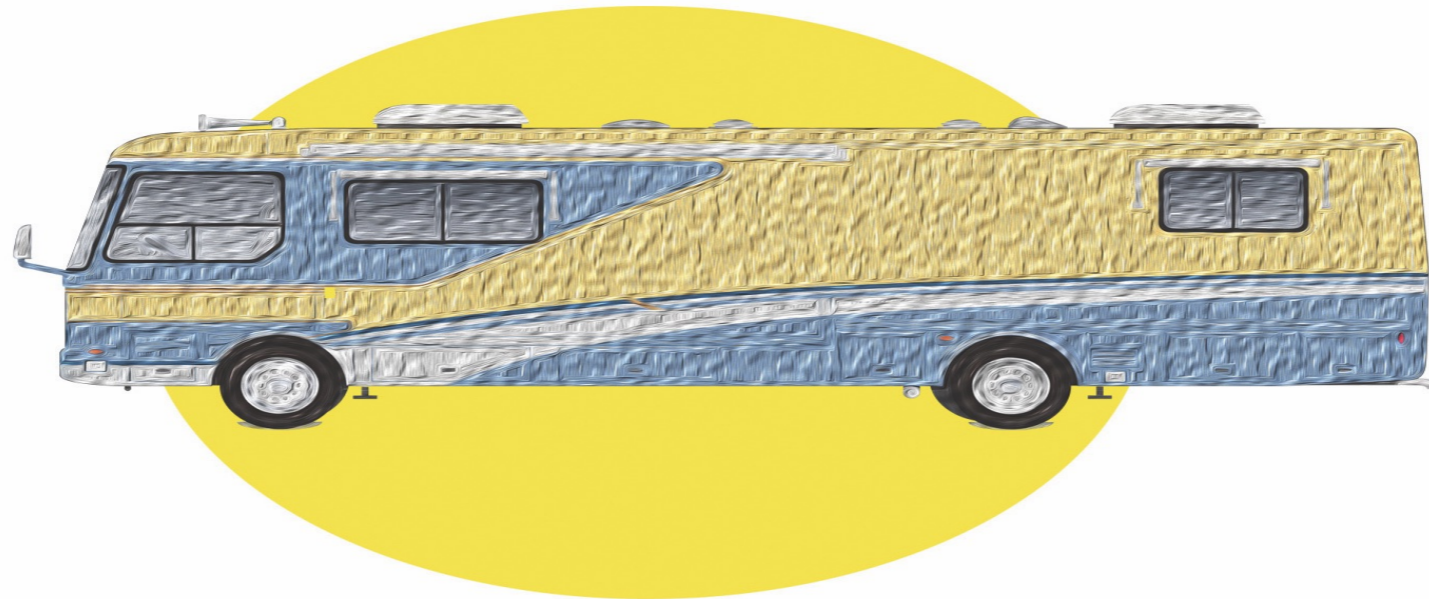
giggled as my dad pulled her in with one of his great bear hugs.

“Daddy, this is my cousin, Finn. He’s Sara’s son. He’s been helping me learn the ins and outs of being a farm girl. He and Granny are my new BFF’s.”

“That’s an awesome ride, Uncle Steve. Do you think we could take a spin?” Finn was already climbing the three big steps on his way into the R.V. and onto the drivers’ seat.

“First things first,” Mommy said. “ Steve you are just in time to cook your famous O’Reilly burgers. The coals are hot and the barbeque is ready!”

Daddy’s eyes lit up. “Fantastic! I haven’t had a bite to eat since breakfast. I’ve been too busy flying and driving.” We all crowded around Daddy and moved our party to the back patio.





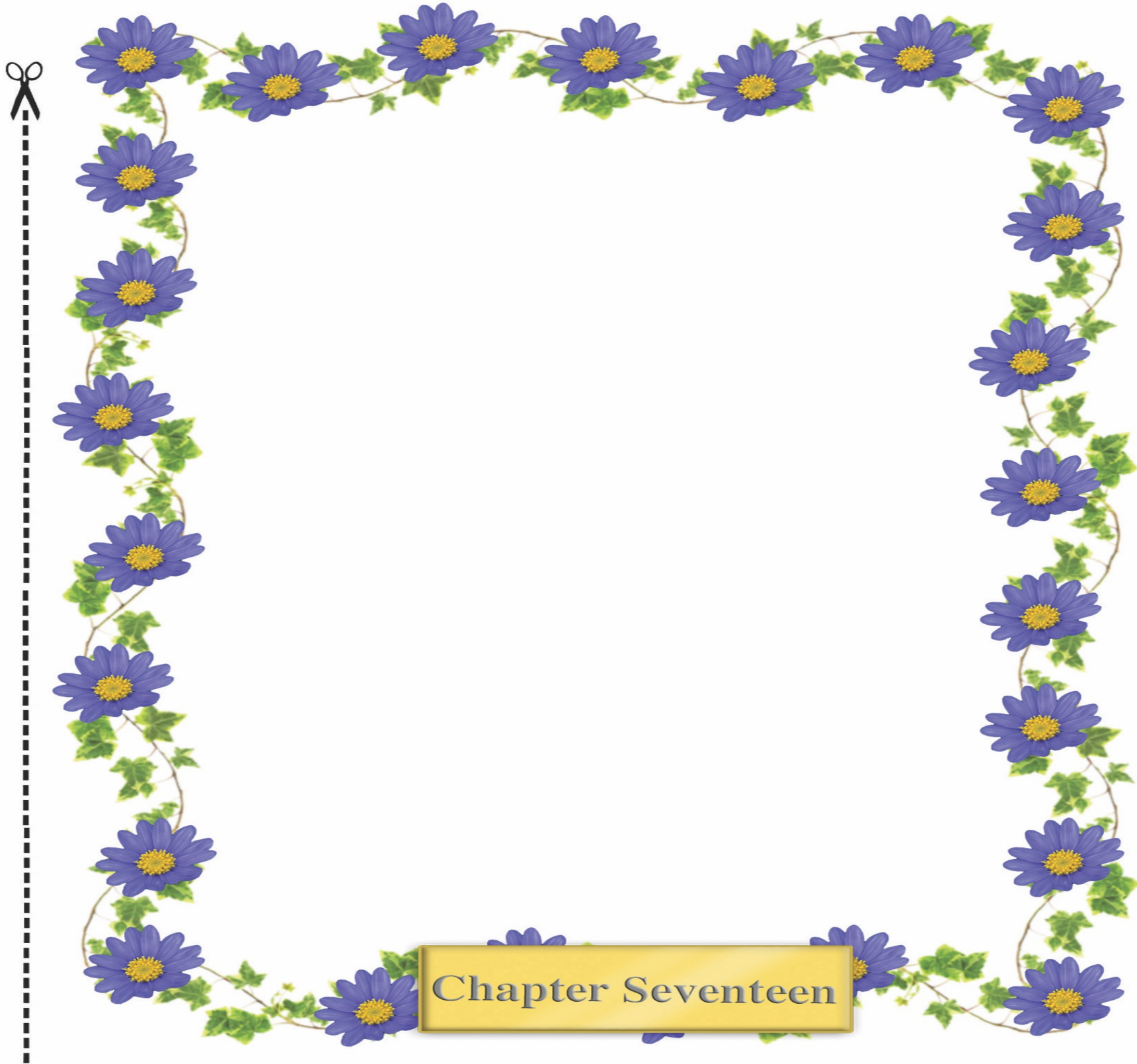
Chapter Sixteen

## Chapter 17

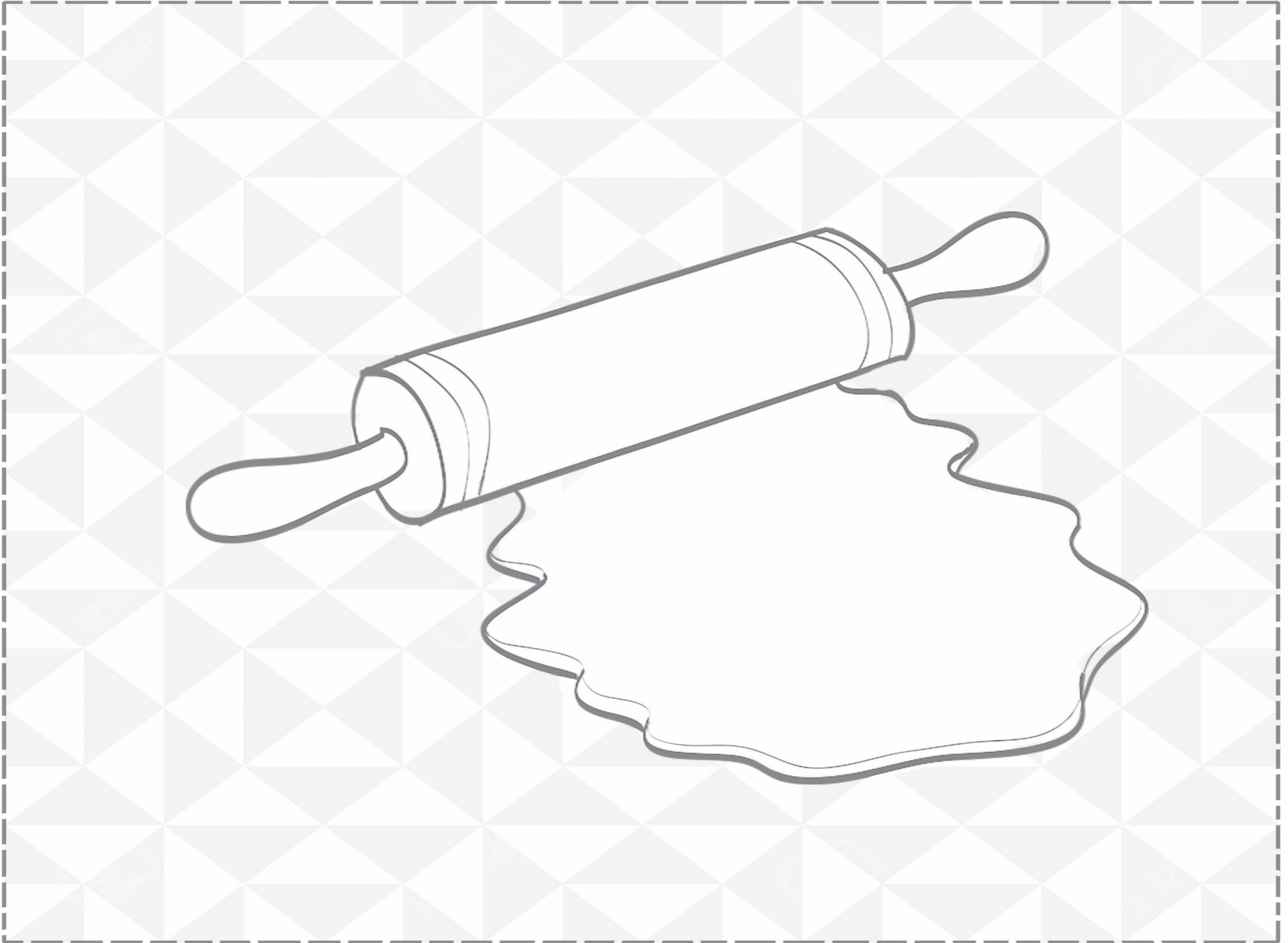
I don't know if it's the air on a farm, the busyness of our days, or just being on vacation, but I ate like there was no tomorrow... again. We had burgers that were so good, Granny's potato salad, (the best ever), corn on the cob (from Granny's field), and peach pie for dessert. Sara joined us just in time to feast. Naturally, William and Harry, Joe and Lulu and Jack and Jill hung out with us as we ate.

After dinner Daddy, Finn and I went out onto the porch to swing, watch the diamonds blossom in the sky and share our adventures of the day, while Mommy, Sara and Granny cleaned up. Then we gathered in the parlor for a jam session. Granny played jazz on the piano, my daddy played jazz guitar, Finn and I played tambourines, Sara played a banjo (unbelievable), and Mommy played harmonica. My Granny has played all these instruments through the years, which is why they were all available for the rest of us to enjoy that special night. We certainly are a talented musical family!

When the clock on the parlor wall chimed 10 p.m., one of the best days of my life came to an end. Sara and Finn left, promising to meet us at the Bedford Bazaar by 9 a.m. the next morning. Daddy wanted to sleep in the R.V. and invited Mommy and me to join him but all we could think about was how great the guest bed would feel to our, "oh so tired" bodies. After a big group hug, Daddy left with William and Harry to camp out under the stars, while Mommy, Granny and I dragged our weary bodies up the long staircase to our cozy beds.



Chapter Seventeen





## Chapter 18

The next thing I knew, Mommy was shaking me gently, whispering in my ear that it was time to get up.

“Come on sleepy head, the Bedford Bazaar will start without us if we don’t hurry.”

“What time is it?” I asked with a dreamy voice.

“It’s 7 a.m.”

I jumped out of bed in a complete panic. Mommy told me to calm down and handed me my favorite new pair of denim shorts and a pink tee shirt with the words “STAR POWER” across the front of it. I bought them specifically for today. My new white sandals completed my outfit.

We hurried down the stairs and were surprised to find Daddy and Ernie cutting watermelon and putting fresh bagels and cream cheese out for breakfast.

“It’s about time you slackers got up. Ernie and I have been doing all the morning chores without you.”

Just then Granny came into the kitchen. She was dressed in cowboy jeans, cowboy boots and a tee shirt with the words “Granny’s Pies” in fancy writing across the front.

“Well it’s a wonderful thing to have you fine boys around today. Sure and if I didn’t know better I might be thinkin’ I’m a tad too old for all this.”

“Not you Granny!” Daddy said, bear hugging her at the same time. “Now eat up girls while Ernie and I load the R.V. with those famous pies.”

Ten minutes later, Granny, Mommy and I entered our rented home on wheels. It actually looked like a beautiful modern house. There was a living room with two comfy couches which could become beds simply by pushing a

button. There was also a dining room table with leather benches to sit on while eating. There was a beautiful kitchen that had a stove, refrigerator and even a dishwasher hidden inside wooden cupboards.

As we moved toward the back, there was a modern bathroom with a tile shower and a bathtub. In the far back was a bedroom, which looked like a fancy hotel room. That's where Ernie sat guarding all the pies, which were stacked in piles of three and were tied to the bed frame.

"Are we good to go, Ernie?" Daddy asked as he came to inspect the cargo.

"Wait one minute, boys. Aren't we forgettin' the quilts?" Granny reminded Daddy and Ernie.

"We certainly did not forget," Ernie said. "They are safe and sound in the storage compartments on the outside of the R.V."

"Gracious me, will wonders never cease!" Granny giggled and from her laughter I could tell all was well.

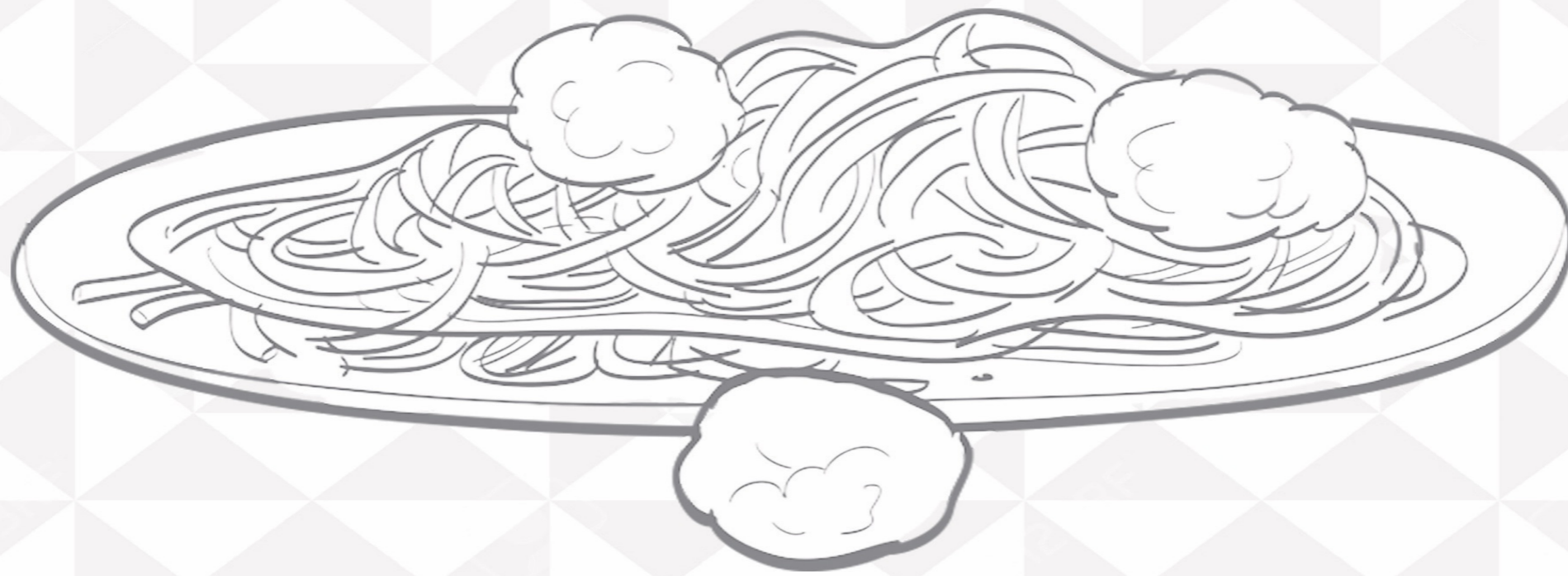
Everyone moved back to the front of our house on wheels. Ernie, however, stayed back to guard the pies. Mommy and I sat on one of the couches, strapping our seatbelts, while Daddy took the driver's seat. Granny sat down in the front passenger seat.

"Now isn't this a grand way to travel. Can I drive us home, Stevie?" Granny begged.

I think that my old granny is fearless because it looked to me as though steering this huge vehicle was not easy! When Daddy told her she could drive us all home, Granny clapped her bumpy wrinkly hands with glee as we sped off toward town.



Chapter Eighteen



## Chapter 19

After a short ride on a country road with other farms like Granny's, we approached a big sign announcing that we had arrived at the town of Bedford, Iowa...population 1,440. My school back home has 1,100 students so I realized in that moment that Bedford is a really small town. We drove very slowly down the main street (called Main Street). It was paved entirely of red bricks.

"Keep your eyes open Stevie. God knows we don't want to be runnin' anyone over," Granny warned my dad. It was pretty clear that the entire community had turned out for this great Bazaar.

Granny directed Daddy to the front of City Hall where we found lots of white awnings with tables underneath them. These were there to hold whatever people were selling.

"Here we go Stevie. You can park right here in front of awnings 4 and 5." As we parked our luxury R.V, Sara and Finn ran up to help us unload our pies and Granny's quilts.

"Time for teamwork," Granny instructed. We all formed a chain starting with Ernie and passed, first the pies and then the quilts, out to our tables. Sara and Mommy helped Granny with signs explaining what was what.

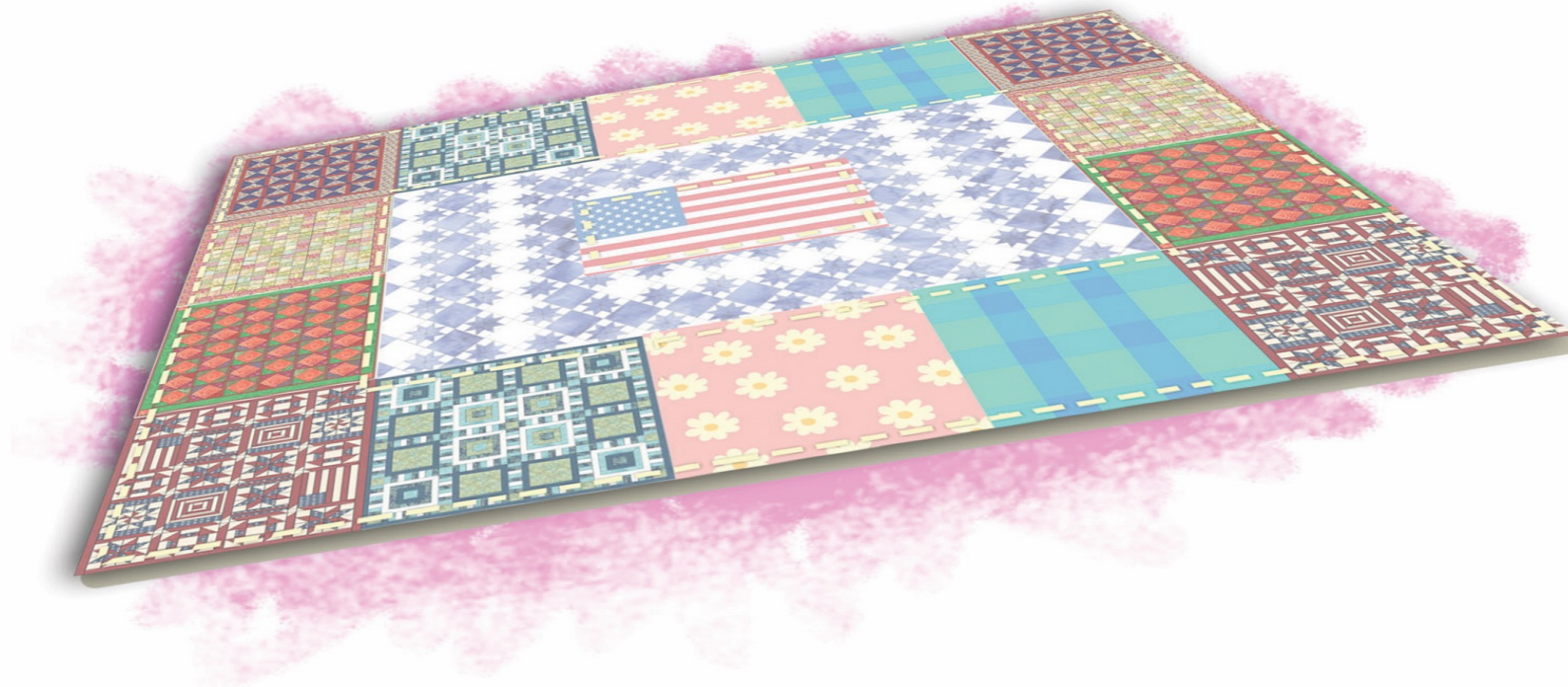
"Dearest Katie and Finn come help me with the quilts won't you now?" Granny asked, showing us what to do.

We arranged all the quilts... opening each one just enough to show the different designs that Granny had created. She had quilted all of these since the day after last year's Bazaar and had made certain each quilt was a masterpiece. (I was beginning to realize Granny's sewing skills were really

impressive and that her old, old hands were masterpieces, too)

Through the years, (over fifty Sara said) Granny had become famous in the town of Bedford. She was considered an artist in this field of quilting. These works of art rested on the tables under awning 5 while the pies, also works of art, were displayed under awning 4.

Mommy took lots of pictures of all of us posing around our products displayed on the tables under the awnings in front of City Hall. She is the kind who loves to preserve memories in pictures...a very good thing!





Chapter Nineteen

## Chapter 20

“Can I show Katie around?” Finn asked my parents once we were all set to sell.

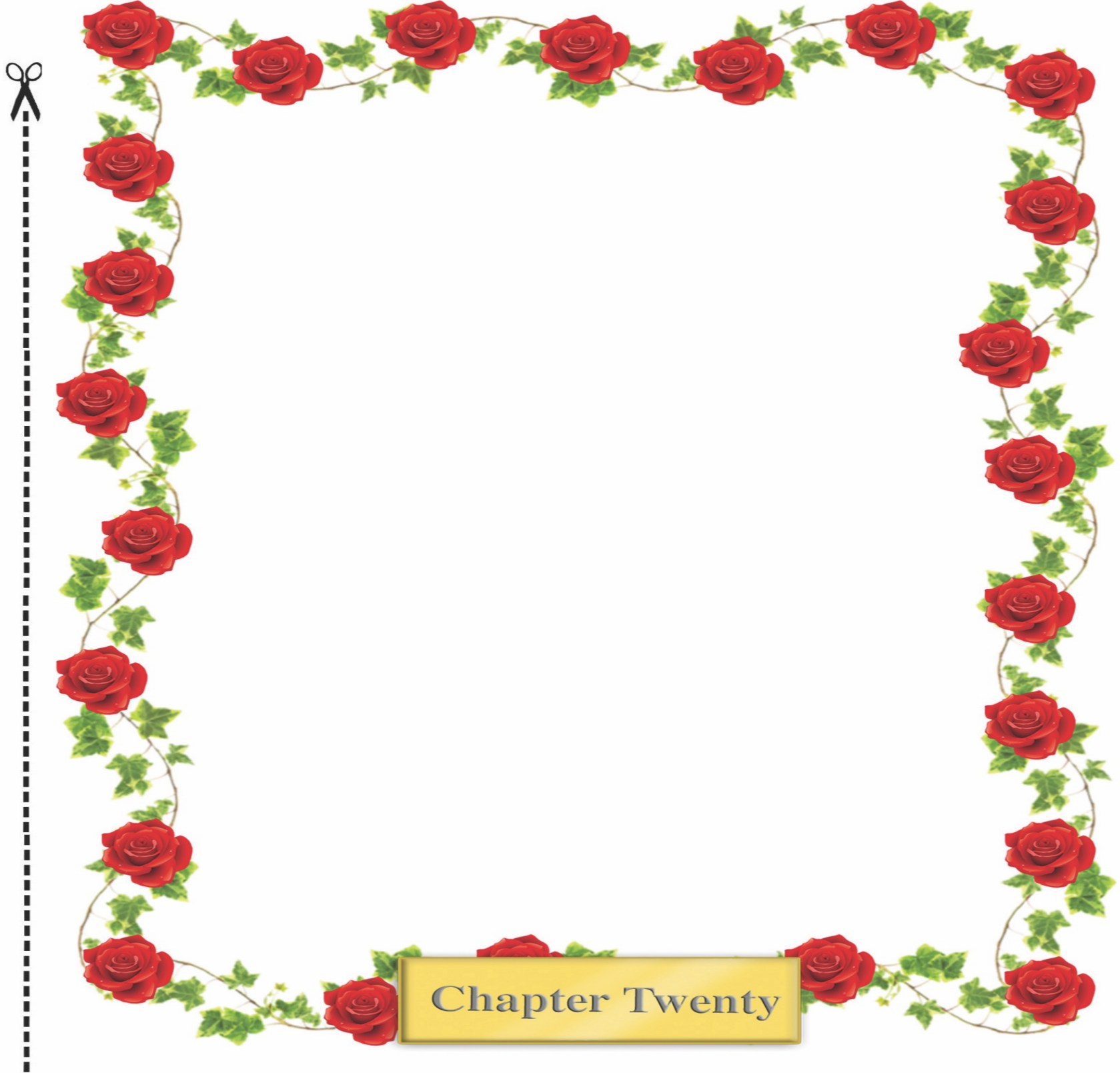
Before anyone could say no, including myself, Finn was pulling me with him. I had been to fairs and carnivals and swap meets back in California, but I had never seen anything like this. The awesome looking building called City Hall sat in the middle of a huge piece of land that looked like an enormous park...and not just any pretty park. It was a park with wonderful old trees, lots and lots of different flowers of many colors and types, and pathways where people could stroll and take in the views.

Today, this park was covered with all sorts of rides for kids and adults. There was a huge variety of artwork for people to buy... from paintings, to sculptures, to glass blown creations, to woodcarvings. There were all types of foods to eat, both healthy food and junk food, too.

There was a big stage at the back of the park where people were able to sing, dance, play instruments, tell jokes, do juggling acts and entertain all of us at the Bazaar. There was one group of men who called themselves a barbershop quartet. Using just their voices they each sang a different part to old-fashioned songs. I started to imagine myself singing with my friends and sounding like these men...except girl voices.

But, as lovely as Finn's tour had been, I really wanted to stay and help Granny. Finn didn't seem to care. He had bought a ton of tickets with money he had earned himself, and he ran off to ride on the rollercoaster and the Ferris wheel. Actually, I get very nervous on both these types of rides and I would rather save my money than spend it on stuff that scares me.





Chapter Twenty



## Chapter 21

By 10:00 a.m. our products were starting to sell like hot-cakes. It was a good thing I had decided to stay and help. Daddy briefly disappeared and came back with an antique rocking chair he had seen when we first arrived.

“Granny, you sit yourself down here in the seat of honor. Your job as the supervisor is to bark orders when you see fit,” Daddy told Granny firmly. He could see she was getting a little bit tired. Even though Granny protested, I could tell she was happy with this plan.

“Very well, then. Lilly, I’m puttin’ yourself in charge of the quilts and Katie you’ll be your mother’s helper. They are each to be sold for 100 tickets, (each ticket was worth one dollar), but, if people want to pay more, why then, that’s for them to do...and won’t we all be better for it!” Granny was very good at business, I could tell.

“Ernie, since you boxed and marked all the pies, you’ll be in charge of them and Stevie, you’ll be his assistant.”

Granny made her last demand. “ Each of you will be givin’ your tickets to Sara, and she’ll be bringin’ all the tickets to me. I’ll be keepin’ track of those for sure!”

Since we all had our jobs, the day went smoothly. By 3:00 p.m. everything at our two tables had been sold. And the best thing of all was this: I realized that my old Granny is a true Super Star! Everyone who came to our tables hugged my Granny as if she were their Granny. People who were young, old and every age in between had a story to tell about her. Apparently, Granny and her husband (my Great Grandfather) had brought many townspeople into the world. My Great Grandfather had been a doctor and Granny had been a midwife

(a woman who helps other women give birth). Before women went to the hospital to have babies, they stayed at home. Granny and my Great Grandfather went to them when their children were ready to be born and had helped lots of babies come into this world...Awesome!

Other people told me stories about the farm animals Granny had helped birth and others she had helped save. Some people said that Granny had taught them to play the piano and others had learned quilting from her. They all spoke of her kindness, her sense of humor and how much they loved her. And everyone told me that my Granny had healing hands.

One lady who was as old as Granny said, “Your Granny is my good friend. We have known each other since we were 10 years old. Your Granny has worked many miracles with those hands of hers and her gift has been our blessing. Perhaps you will have healing hands too?”

She took my hands in hers and then announced to everyone around, “Why yes, I do believe you have your Granny’s healing hands. Do not waste this gift, Katie. There are too few healers in this world today.”

I didn’t know what she was talking about but everyone laughed and patted me on the back like I was something special. I worried when I thought my hands might look scary some day, but I also thought how great it would be to have hands that could heal people and animals, and play the piano like an expert, hands that could bake and quilt, and hands that could feel as good as Granny’s.



Chapter Twenty-One



## Chapter 22

By the time we had cleaned up and were ready to go, Finn showed up. He had been gone all day. Except for an occasional phone call to let Sara know he was still alive, no one had particularly thought about him. That's how it was with Finn... "He's a very independent sort," Granny had told me.

"Hey everyone, I've been having a blast! I'll bet none of you can guess how many times I rode the coaster? If anyone cares, I broke a town record today."

"Well, if my memory serves me right, the number must be greater than 52. That record was set by your own dear mother in 1999 as I recall." Granny said with pride.

"That's true," Sara told Finn.

"So come on, out with it. How many go rounds did you manage?" Granny demanded.

"Try not to be jealous Mom, but I beat you by 11. I would have kept going but I saw from the top of the Ferris wheel that we were packing up, so I figured I better get back and give you guys a hand."

"How kind of you," Sara said sarcastically. "You are just in time to hear the final total our pies and quilts brought in today. We set a new record too. Drum roll if you please!"

We all made the sound of a drum roll and then Sara announced that we had brought in a whopping \$6,450. Daddy whistled, Mommy, Granny and I clapped and Ernie and Finn danced around like country western dancers. We all knew this would help a lot of townspeople in need. We had definitely done our part and we all felt really good about it.

As we headed for the house on wheels, Finn began to plead with Sara, "Mom, please let me ride home in the R.V.

Uncle Steve says it is perfectly fine with him.”

Sara happily agreed.

“Why don’t you follow us home, Sara? I have a big pot of bean soup and your favorite... my special corn bread, waiting for us hard working fundraisers?”

“That sounds wonderful, Granny! I’d love to come for supper.”

Daddy quickly chimed in. “Don’t follow us too closely though because Granny will be navigating our R.V. and I have no idea...”

“Now, Stevie, you best be watchin’ what you say. You know quite well I’ve been drivin’ four wheelers, tractors, trucks with horse trailers and other vehicles that make drivin’ this R.V. look like child’s play.”

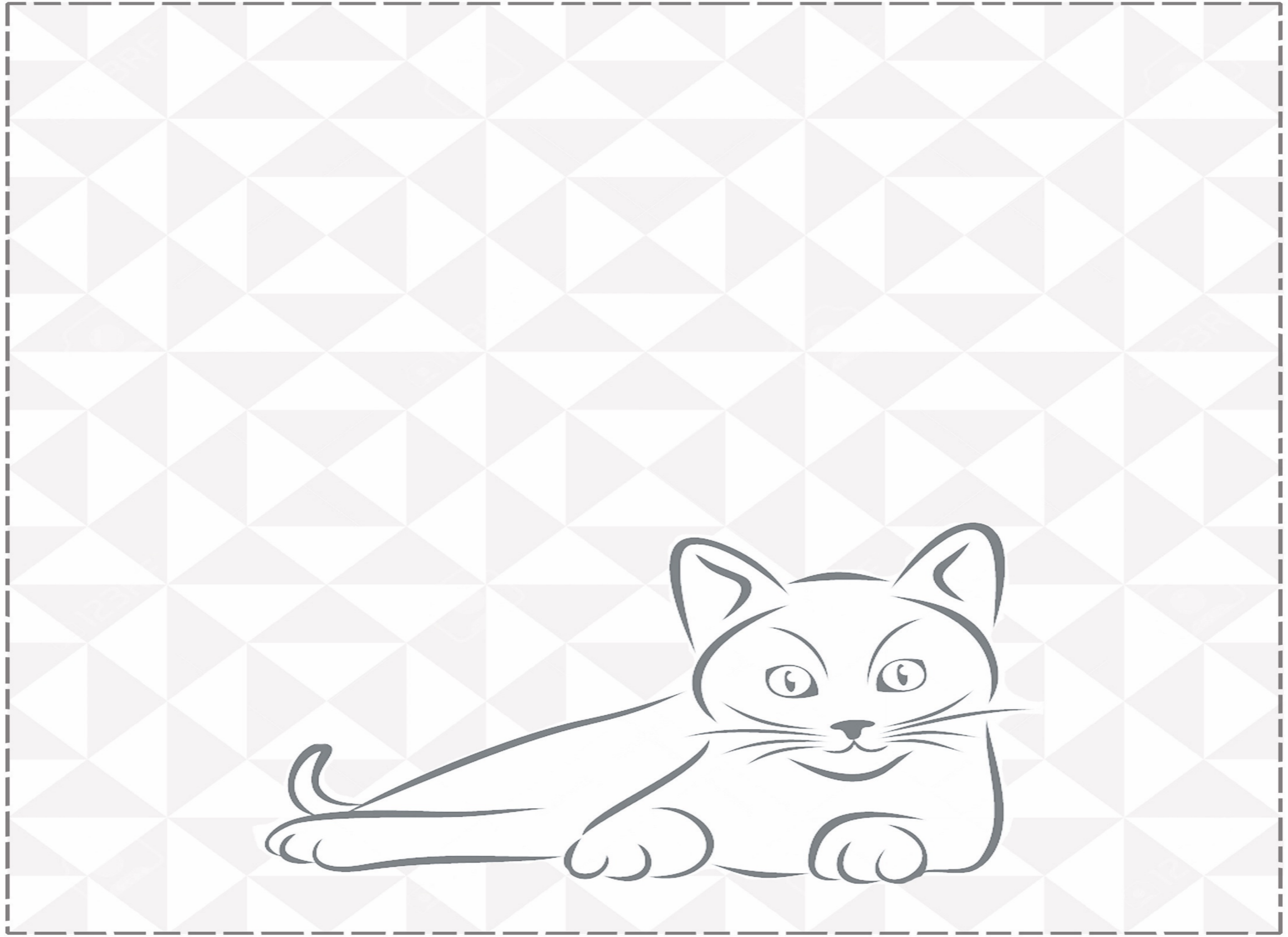
“Oops! So true, Granny...what was I thinking. Well then, let’s get going,” Daddy said as he grabbed Granny’s new rocking chair, a cherry pie and a quilt with landmarks of Bedford and led the way to the R.V.







Chapter Twenty-Two



## Chapter 23

After Daddy adjusted the driver's seat for Granny so her feet reached the pedals perfectly, he explained the many buttons on the front panel.

“Stevie, I may be a bit old but my eyes and my brain are as good as yours!” I think she was a bit insulted.

Daddy quickly apologized and told her he felt safe having her at the wheel. Finally, we left Bedford behind and made our way home. We were all pretty pooped, everyone except Granny that is! She was so happy driving all of us that she sang a bunch of her favorite Irish songs almost all the way to the front door. Again, I have to comment on Granny's ability to drive this huge vehicle. To say she was completely at ease would be an understatement. Her hands took command of the steering wheel like she had driven this baby all her life. And, I say that she sang “almost” all the way to the front door because of a startling event that occurred just outside the main gate of Granny's farm.

I had been dosing in and out of sleep listening to Granny's soothing voice. Suddenly, the singing stopped and I was jolted awake by Granny's slamming on the brakes and Sara and Finn yelling, “Look out Granny,” while Granny chimed in, “Good Lord in heaven and Saints preserve us...(an old Irish expression).”

All the horses, including Toby, all the goats and cows, and even the micro pigs were loose. They were trying to escape down the road and, if it hadn't been for William and Harry, they might have gotten clean away. Those two beautiful Australian Shepherds were doing their job. They were barking their brains out and nipping at the feet of Granny's animals, so

that all these escape artists were being forced back up the driveway.

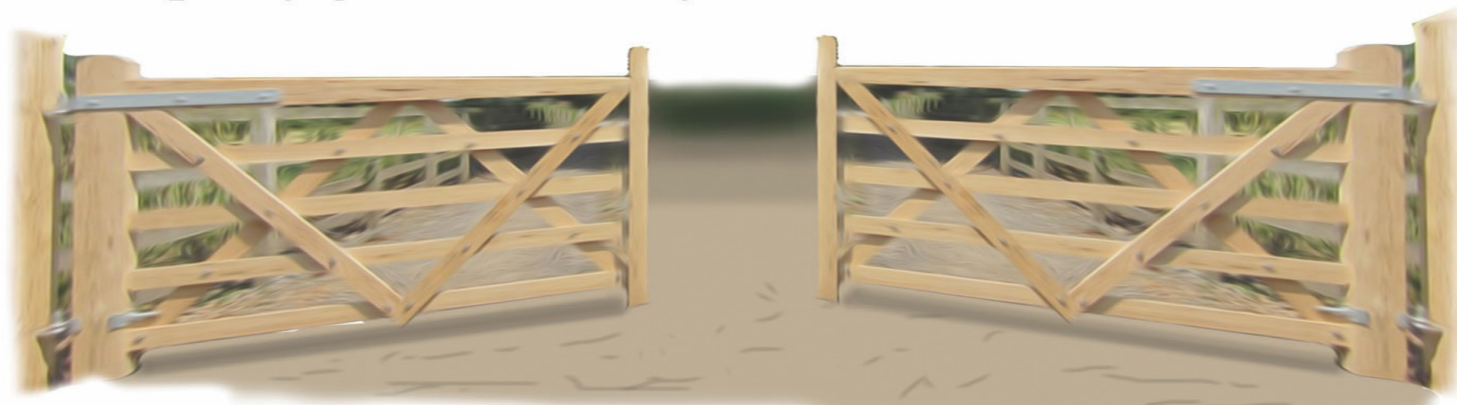
At first we were all in shock, but once we knew that William and Harry had everything covered, we started laughing, first, a bit nervously but then, in full force.

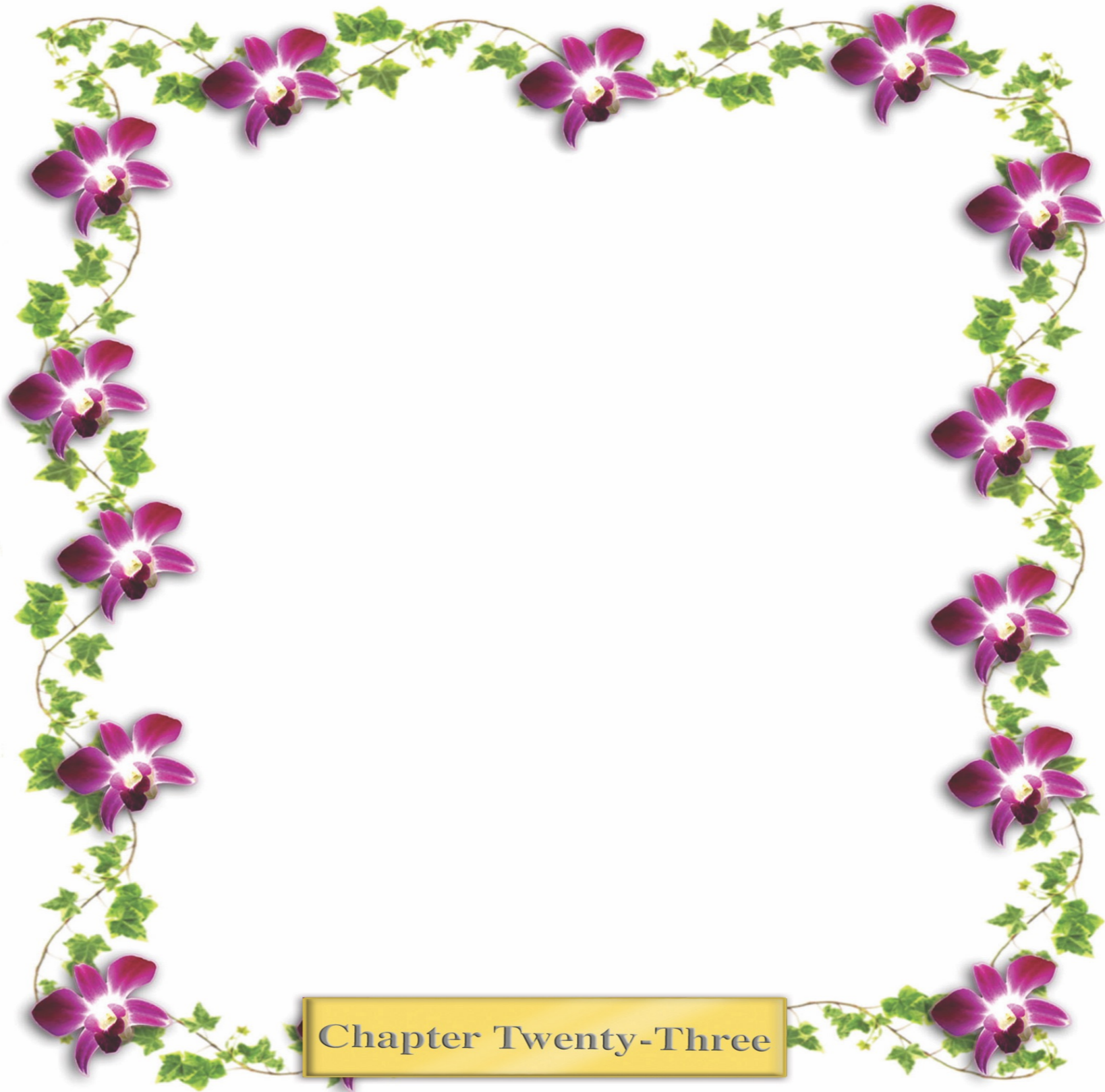
Granny explained, “This stunt has the markings of Bernie written all over it...up to his shenanigans again, he is!”

Bernie, a grey and white quarter horse, was the reason this chaos had occurred. He was almost 30 years old (very old for a horse) and had always loved to get into mischief.

“Not only can he unlock gates, he also knows how to turn on hoses and sprinklers. He’s been at it for years!”

Granny was kind of proud of Bernie because she said he still had plenty of life left in him, as well as still having a sense of humor. I have to hand it to my old granny for always seeing the good and the fun in everything. I decided right there and then to copy Granny in this way. Not only would I work to have Granny’s expert hands, I would work to have her great way of seeing life. I think this was going to help me have a pretty great life of my own.





Chapter Twenty-Three

## Chapter 24

Everyone except Granny climbed out of the R.V. to help William and Harry with the rounding up of all the animals. Daddy and Ernie saw to the goats and cows, Finn and Sara gathered up the micro pigs, and Mommy and I took care of the horses. William and Harry stayed at the main gate and continued barking until all the animals were back in their pens, pastures, or stables. Toby walked next to me the whole way back to his stall with Mama Lizzie following right behind us. As for Bernie, well he trotted back to his stall and closed his stall gate once inside. Then he neighed as if to say, “That made my day!” What a character!

Once all the animals were safe and sound, Granny bolted the main gate and brought the R.V. on up the driveway, William and Harry running proudly behind her. For some reason she decided to park out on the edge of the northern most pasture which had a perfect view of the rolling hills beyond. When she reached the wrap around porch she asked, “So who’ll be sleeping with me in the house on wheels tonight?”

Finn and I were definitely up for that. Sara had to go to the veterinary office and make sure her patients were doing o.k. If all was well, she said she’d love to join us later. My mom and dad loved the idea of having the guest room all to themselves so everyone was happy.

“Good, then, it’s all settled. Now let’s go fill up on bean soup and corn bread. And who is hungry, now?” Granny asked as we followed her into the kitchen with everyone competing for the, “ I’m the hungriest ” award!

Once dinner was done, we all cleaned the kitchen. Then, Granny had Finn and me follow her up the stairs and into her

bedroom. It seems as though there is always an adventure just around the corner on this vacation. Opening the door to Granny's bedroom was just this. One whole wall was covered with photographs. Some of the photos were one hundred years old and even older. Her parents and her grand parents, cousins, her husband, her daughter Mary, and Mary's daughter...my mom, were all there. Sara and my mom were in lots of childhood photos showing life on the farm, which had changed greatly in the many years Granny had lived here. There were pictures of Finn and me at various ages. There was one whole section of the wall upon which the photos of all of Granny's animals rested. I couldn't stop staring at these photographs until Finn's voice brought me out of my trance.

“Earth to Katie, come and help us.”

I looked around but didn't see Finn or Granny. I finally found them digging around in Granny's super big closet.

“Well here we go. I knew they were here.”

Granny had located two sleeping bags that had belonged to Sara and my mom. “Let's just shake the spiders out of these old bags and they'll be perfect for the likes of you two.”

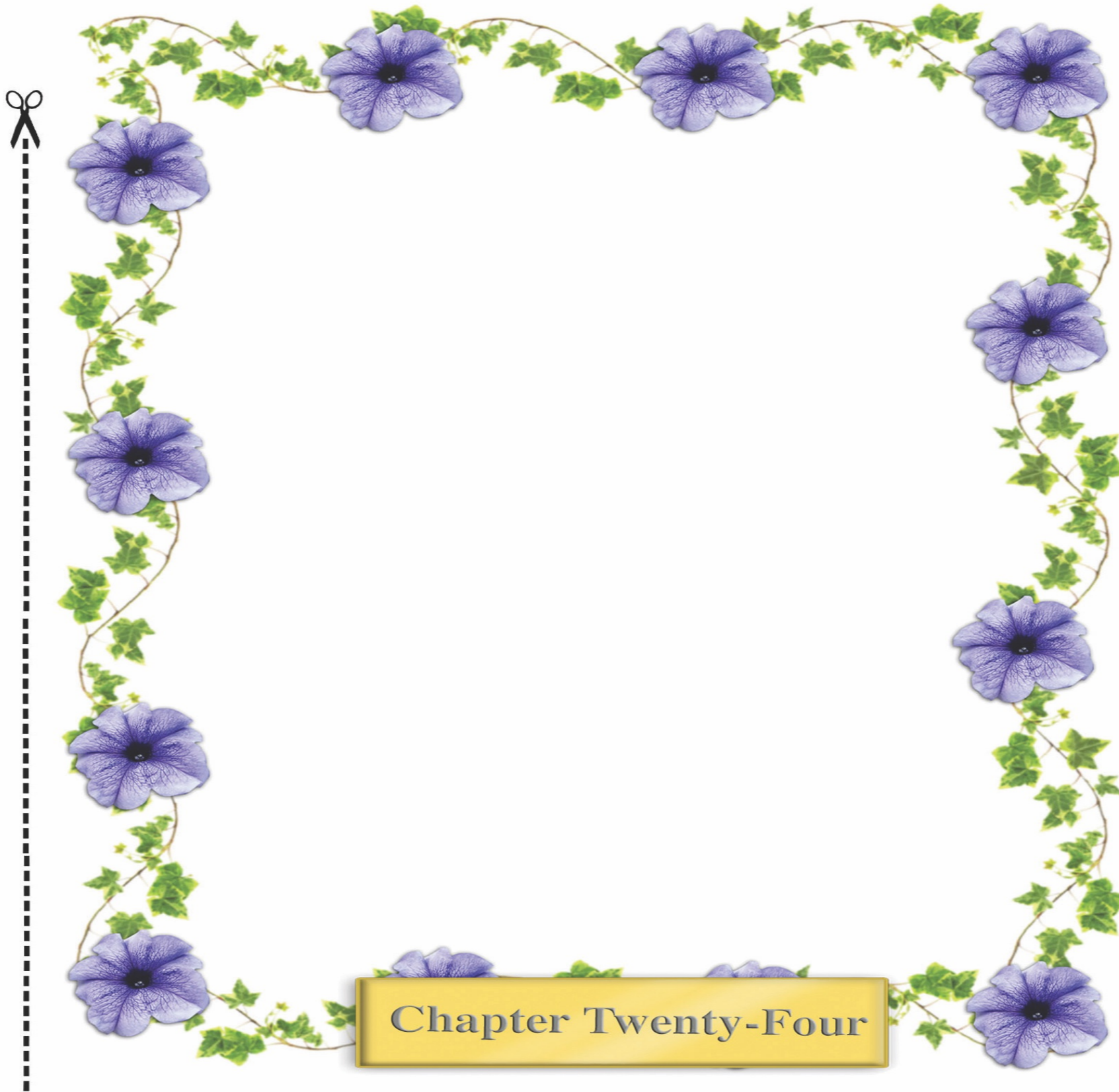
Granny laughed as she unzipped the bags and pretended to shake out the bugs. It sort of freaked me out but Granny promised there were no creatures hiding where our bodies would soon be sleeping.

“Now go get your pajamas Katie. Finn, grab one of these bags and I'll take the other. We'll be waitin' for ya on the porch, Katie. Two minutes, now,” Granny told me as I hurried to do exactly as she asked.

That night was really special. Granny and Finn taught me how to play scrabble. The three of us sat in our pajamas around the R.V. dining table talking, laughing and playing this fun new game. We all kept gazing out the windows at the beautiful stars that filled this Iowa sky. By 10:00 p.m. we were all pretty tired. I hated for this day to end, though. It had been exciting, interesting, fun and, best of all, it was clear to me how much I was coming to know and love my granny. When she tucked Finn and me into our sleeping bags on our R.V. couch/beds that night, I showed her so with an extra special hug and kiss.







Chapter Twenty-Four

## Chapter 25

Sunday was a day of rest and recreation. Sara woke Finn and me up at 9:00 a.m. and told us to hurry and get ready for a day at Three Fires Lake. I ran to the house with Finn trying to beat me to the kitchen door. I won! Once inside, I darted up the stairs and into the guest room. Mommy and Daddy were making the bed when I burst in announcing that they needed to get ready for a day at Three Fires Lake.

I changed into my bathing suit. I put on a new pair of shorts and tee shirt on top of my bathing suit. Last, but not least, I slipped into my flip-flops. I was raring to go! As the three of us headed down the stairs a new aroma from the kitchen hit my nose.

“Popovers!” Mommy said.

“My favorite!” Daddy said.

Now, if you have never had popovers, I can only tell you that they are delicious. Granny was just pulling them out of the oven as the three of us rushed in. Finn and Sara were putting a huge bowl of fresh strawberries onto the kitchen table where we all took our places. Granny placed a platter of hot popovers onto the table and joined us as we stuffed our faces with more glorious food.

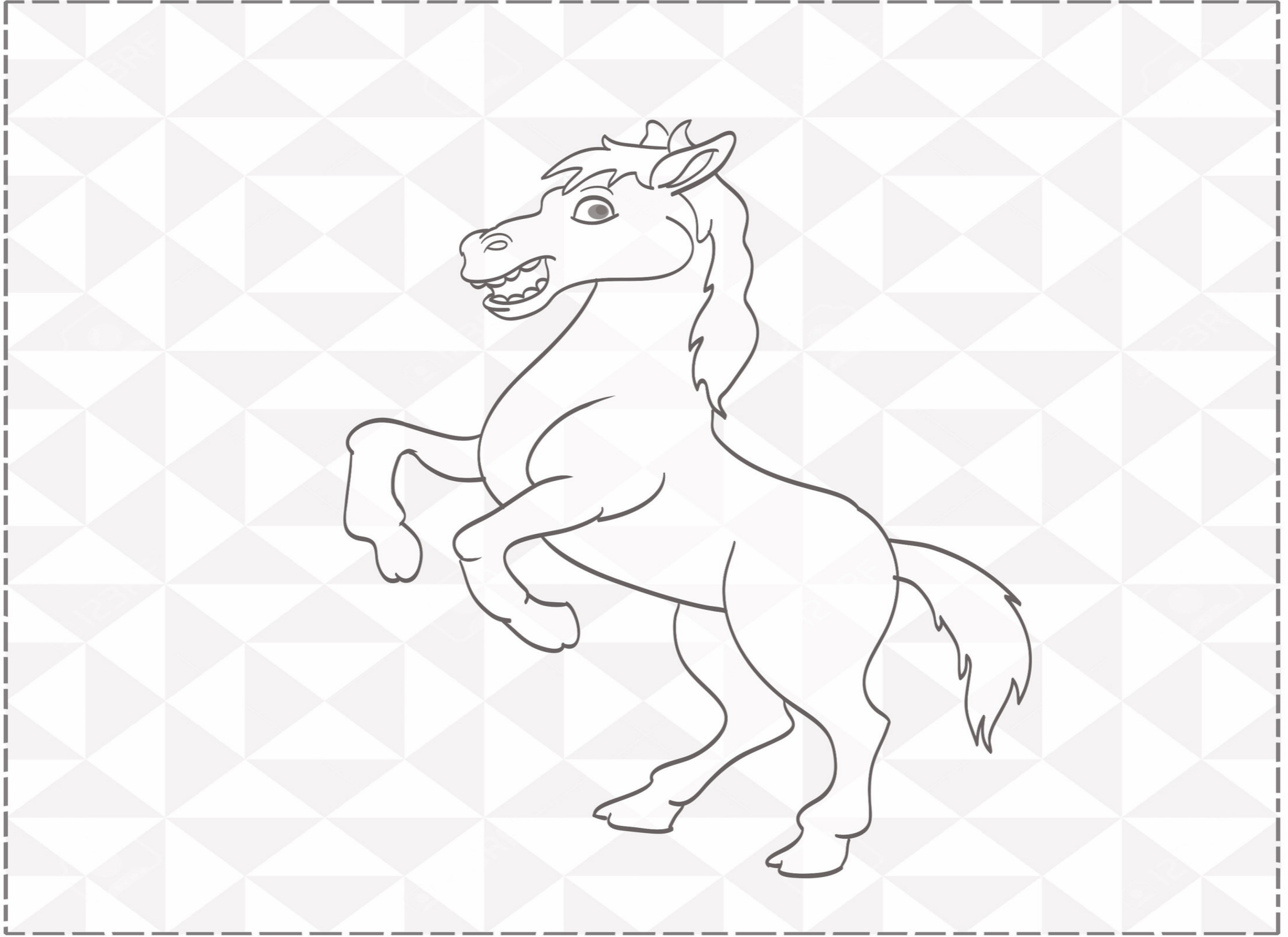
Then, we all piled into Annie and, with Daddy at the wheel, left to spend our Sunday swimming, canoeing, playing volleyball and hiking around the beautiful trails surrounding Three Fires Lake. We ate hot dogs, chips and roasted marshmallows...not the healthiest lunch but definitely yummy.

We were all asleep by 9:00 p.m. that night. Sara and Finn went home to their house and Daddy, Mommy and I slept in the house on wheels. William and Harry cuddled next to me all

night, which made me feel so happy.



Chapter Twenty-Five



## Chapter 26

The rest of my vacation went by in a flash. Granny always says that time flies when you're having fun and that was true for me. Most of the time I played with Toby and Lizzie. Little Toby followed me around whenever I joined him and Lizzie in the pasture or the corral. That was really great.

Granny said, "Well of course Katie dear. Your love and your voice were two of Toby's first memories. Next to his mother, you are it!" The truth was I did feel his love for me and I loved him, too.

Then there was my cousin Finn. I really think that having an older boy cousin is almost as special as my relationship with Toby. It was fun having him tease me, teach me new things and hang out together.

On Tuesday, Finn, Mommy, Granny and I went into Bedford. We went antiquing because Bedford is famous for its many antique stores. Finn and Granny taught Mommy and me how to separate the junk from the gems.

We all went home with a gem. Mommy and I found necklaces, which Granny said were very old. That made them valuable but I just loved mine. It had a heart-shaped charm that dangled from a pretty fine gold chain. The heart opened and Granny said I could put pictures inside it. Mommy found a necklace of pearls with a clasp of gold. The shopkeeper, Millie, thought the pearls were fake but Granny took Mommy aside and whispered,

"Those pearls are the real thing, dearie, of that I am quite certain. Snatch them up before the truth is discovered!"

Mommy told Millie, "I love costume jewelry and have a dress that will look great with this piece."

“Wonderful!” Millie responded excitedly. “They are 50% off today...a real bargain... \$ 8.00 for both! ”

My mother handed her the money and put the necklace around her neck just as I had done with mine. Granny smiled the hugest smile I have ever seen. Finn almost gave us away because he burst out laughing when he realized we had scored these valuable antiques.

Finn’s gem was an old camera that cost \$5.00. He tried to wheel and deal with the shopkeeper and she finally agreed to his price of \$4.00. But he and Granny had huddled together a few minutes before and had realized that this particular camera was a rare find. It was fun to be in on this secret, especially since \$5.00 was much less than it was worth. Finn told me later that bargaining with the shopkeeper and getting it for \$4.00 was all part of the game.

Granny found a great gem. It was a Waterford Crystal cross and it came from Ireland. Granny had been born in Ireland but had come to America when she was a little girl. Although she loved her home in Iowa, her eyes filled with tears as she held the Irish cross in her worn and tired hands. This look played on the heartstrings of Millie and she told Granny that she could have the cross for \$10.00, a great price for so many reasons.

“ You have a deal,” Granny told Millie as her face began to beam with such a win!

“Wonderful!” Millie responded excitedly. “They are 50% off today...a real bargain... \$ 8.00 for both! ”

My mother handed her the money and put the necklace around her neck just as I had done with mine. Granny smiled the hugest smile I have ever seen. Finn almost gave us away because he burst out laughing when he realized we had scored these valuable antiques.

Finn’s gem was an old camera that cost \$5.00. He tried to wheel and deal with the shopkeeper and she finally agreed to his price of \$4.00. But he and Granny had huddled together a few minutes before and had realized that this particular camera was a rare find. It was fun to be in on this secret, especially since \$5.00 was much less than it was worth. Finn told me later that bargaining with the shopkeeper and getting it for \$4.00 was all part of the game.

Granny found a great gem. It was a Waterford Crystal cross and it came from Ireland. Granny had been born in Ireland but had come to America when she was a little girl. Although she loved her home in Iowa, her eyes filled with tears as she held the Irish cross in her worn and tired hands. This look played on the heartstrings of Millie and she told Granny that she could have the cross for \$10.00, a great price for so many reasons.

“ You have a deal,” Granny told Millie as her face began to beam with such a win!



Chapter Twenty-Six



## Chapter 27

We left Millie, each of us feeling great about our purchases, and decided to meet Sara at Bedford's one-and-only cat shelter. Granny and Sara had opened this nonprofit business when Sara was a teenager. It had been very successful in finding loving homes for the kittens and cats that were brought here through the years. All of Granny's cats came from "The Cat Pantry" as it was called.

When we arrived, a friend of Granny's, named Ella Mae, greeted us warmly announcing that Lulu's sister, Bella, had given birth to a litter of kittens 8 weeks earlier.

"You must come and see these beautiful creatures. They will be available for adoption starting tomorrow. You folks can have the first pick."

Granny rolled her eyes and said, "Mercy, Ella Mae! Now don't you think I have enough animals?"

Ella Mae acted as if she hadn't heard a word Granny said. She pushed us all forward into a large and tidy room where many rescued cats lived until adopted. They all looked happy and healthy as they played with one another. Beyond this sanctuary was a private room where Bella and her brood stayed, safe from the other cats.

"Here they are...Have you ever!" Ella Mae gushed as we all gasped in agreement. Bella looked exactly like Granny's Lulu and 5 of her 9 kittens looked like miniatures of them.

"I need to make a phone call but you all can stay and play with my pretties until I get back," Ella Mae told us as she hurried out the door.

"Well, I can see she is up to her trickery again," Granny said about Ella Mae as she picked up one of the kitties with her

warm and loving hands. “She knows how easily I fall in love with the babies. She is countin’ on me to be takin’ a few home.”

“Oh yes, Granny,” I pleaded. “Let’s do it. Lulu would love to teach them the ins and outs of farm life!” I said like I was some type of an expert in such matters.

“You are thinkin’ about the fun and ignorin’ the work. And besides, you will be leavin’ day after tomorrow. I have plenty to do on the farm as it is,” Granny said with a firm and final voice as she put the kitty back with the others.

It hit me all at once. A sad feeling began to swell inside of me and I started to cry. The tears were streaming down my face...I couldn’t help it.

“Katie, dear,” Granny said as her hands drew me into her. “These beautiful little ones will be findin’ wonderful homes. No need now for worry or sadness.”

As Granny stroked my back with her healing hands I began to calm down. What she didn’t know was the truth about the sorrow. I realized this great vacation would end. I would have to leave the farm, all the great animals and, worst of all, day after tomorrow, I would have to say good-bye to my granny.

I’ll tell you what I’m goin’ to do, Katie,” Granny said as she continued to soothe me, thinking it was all about the kitties. “After all of Bella’s beautiful babies are adopted, I’ll be adoptin’ Bella. She came here pregnant and in very bad shape. Ella Mae kept her here when I adopted Lulu. I am sure she will love to be reunited with her sister. Yes, and I do believe this is what is meant to be!”

Everyone (Mommy, Sara, Finn and Ella Mae who

had returned from her phone call) thought this was a great idea. I felt peaceful as Granny stood back and looked into my eyes searching for approval.

“I think it’s a great idea, too. Thank you Granny.” And although the thought of leaving still hurt...it did seem much less.

Sara and Finn parted ways with Granny, Mommy and me. I barely spoke for the entire drive home. I just watched the countryside speed by and tried to memorize this land called Iowa.





Chapter Twenty-Seven

## Chapter 28

Wednesday was, thinking back on all the days of this vacation, my most favorite day of all. Daddy and Finn left early in the morning for a guys' day of fishing and exploring. Finn was the happiest I had seen him. Granny said it was because my daddy was like the father he didn't have.

Mommy met Sara for breakfast in town. Sara had planned a day of fun with some old friends of theirs from childhood. I had met most of them at the Bazaar and it seemed as though Mommy was as excited as Finn about her day.

After Granny and I had a bite to eat and had taken care of the dogs, cats, chickens and ducks, Granny announced she had something new and very important to show me.

"Follow me, Katie my sweet dear," she demanded, taking my hand in hers.

We strolled down the driveway and then cut across a pasture until we found ourselves smack dab in cow territory.

"Now you can't claim to be a farm girl without ever milkin' a cow, can you Katie?" Granny asked with a wink and a big smile across her face.

"Why no, I guess not," I told her with a wink and a smile of my own.

Granny pointed to a small shed across the field. "Go now and fetch the milkin' stool and the milk pail for your old granny and I'll show you what real farmin's all about!"

I was nervous and excited at the same time and hurried to do what Granny wanted. When I got back to her, pail and stool in hand, she introduced me to Elizabeth.

"Elizabeth is my oldest and dearest milkin' cow. She's the best I've got when learnin' the fundamentals of milkin'

because she is kind and patient. Sure and we'll be startin' with her."

Granny placed the stool next to Elizabeth's hindquarters and sat. "Watch very carefully, sweet Katie. This sack is called the utter and these are called tits."

The rest was all show. Granny's worn out old hands were proving once again that you can't judge a book by its cover. Grasping one tit in each hand Granny squeezed and pulled at the same time and out poured two streams of fresh white milk.

It looked pretty easy and I told Granny so but when we switched places I discovered I was wrong. Granny found my clumsy attempt very amusing and laughed until tears flowed down her cheeks. As hard as I tried, I didn't get it.

"Milkin' a cow is tricky business, Katie, but it's nothing you can't learn. Stand up a minute...now sit here in front of me and grab Elizabeth's tits."

I did as Granny said and she placed her hands on top of mine. Then, just as we had done when brushing Toby, our hands danced with a special rhythm and a pull and a squeeze and out poured milk from the old cow's utter. By the time we had milked all of Elizabeth's tits Granny's hands had again passed on great knowledge to me.

"I think you have mastered the feel Katie. Let's go give Samantha a try."

It was true. I had mastered the feeling, thanks, again, to Granny's hands. By the time Betsy and Scarlet were milked, the pail was full. And luckily, Ernie arrived on the golf cart and we all drove back to the house with the milk splashing here and there as we drove.

Granny showed me how to separate the cream from the rest of the milk and we made a big bowl of whipping cream. Next, we used some of the milk to make Granny's famous chocolate pudding. That night, we served it for dessert and, I have to say, it was the best dessert ever!

That afternoon Granny and I sat in lawn chairs under an umbrella and drank homemade lemonade while reading some old stories Granny had written through the years about life on a farm and everything that means. Granny's hands slightly fumbled trying to turn the pages so I became the page-turner and cuddled into Granny as she read to me with her awesome Irish accent. It makes me wish I could speak her way, too.

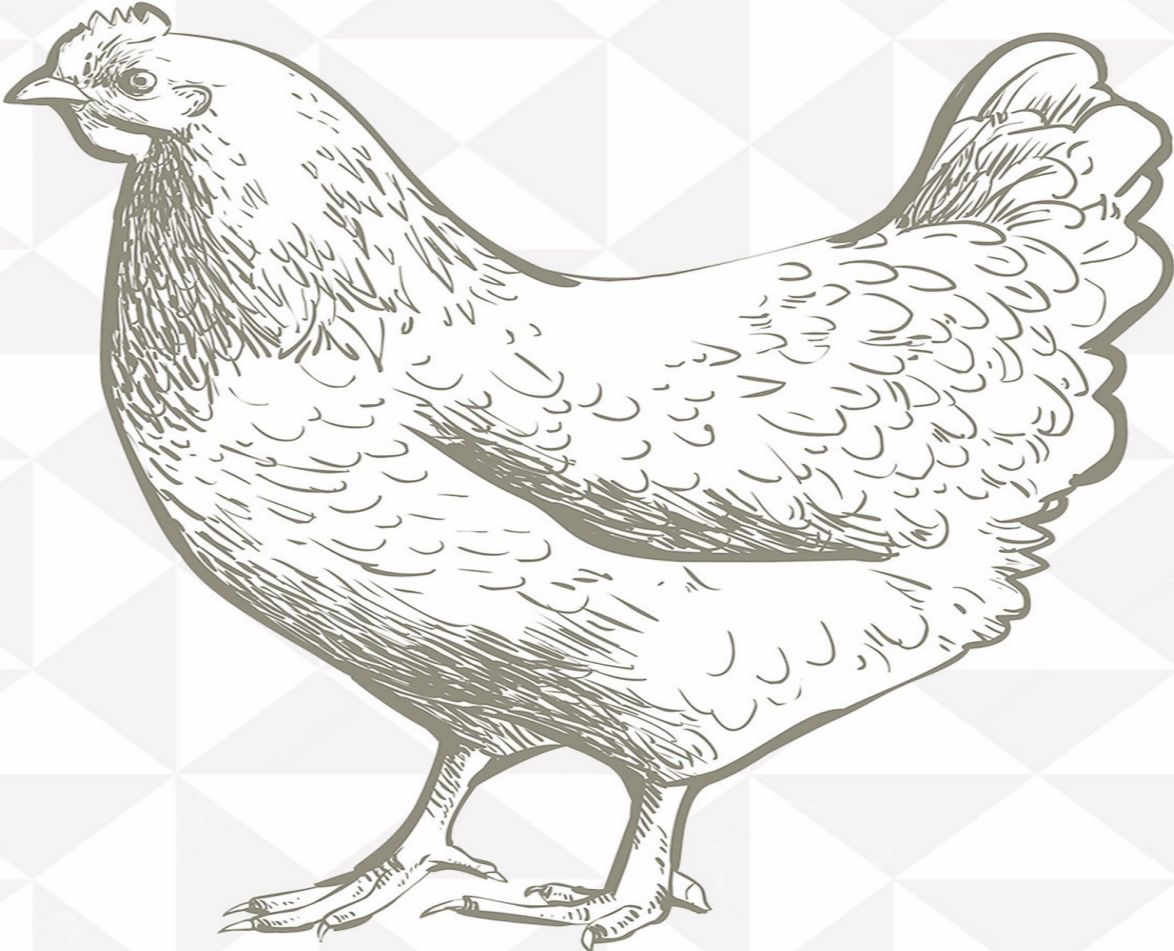
Granny and I also played with Toby while Lizzie kept watch...always nearby. I think bonding with Granny and Toby that afternoon was the best thing about my whole week in Iowa. I will keep these memories forever.





Chapter Twenty-Eight





## Chapter 29

Suddenly, the quiet was interrupted by the sound of Ernie's old rusty truck coming down the driveway. When it reached the corral, Ernie and two little boys, Juan and Pablo, jumped out of the truck and joined Granny, Toby, Lizzie and me.

I have said before that Ernie is a little person, being even shorter than I. His kids were 5 and 6 and they were little people, too. Just like Ernie, this didn't seem to matter to them at all. They loved Toby and weren't afraid of Lizzie even though she looked gigantic next to them.

"Katie dear, won't you and Ernie show Juan and Pablo the micro pigs. Ernie, you can be drivin' them all out to the pigs' poke on the golf cart!"

"Cool!" Juan shouted.

"Awesome!" Pablo said at that same moment.

"Sure, Granny," I told her as the three of us ran to the golf cart next to the barn. For the first time, I was in charge of something having to do with the farm.

Even though I was only slightly older than Ernie's boys, I felt like their big sister as I showed them what Finn had shown me regarding these adorable little pigs. Ernie just watched like a proud papa to us all...pigs included. We were lost in fun when a bell chimed in the distance.

"That's Granny calling," Ernie told us. So we kissed all the piglets goodbye and hurried back to the house on our speedy golf cart.

Music was blasting from the backyard and we all went to investigate. That's when I first met Ernie's wife...another little person. She wasn't much taller than her two boys. She was

setting the huge patio table using a step stool to place a table setting at every chair. The tablecloth was bright red, the plates and glasses were white and there were blue napkins next to each setting.

“Katie dear, this is Martha, Ernie’s wife,” Granny told me as she placed a big basket filled with corn in the middle of the yard. The corn had come from Granny’s fields. It was ripe and ready to be eaten.

“Hello Katie. Your Granny has told me all about you for many years. It is wonderful to finally meet you.” She had the voice of a child to match her child-sized body and greeted me warmly. It was odd hugging an adult who was shorter than myself, but I could tell that she was a kind and loving person.

“All right now, all hands on deck. Don’t ya know this corn won’t be shuckin’ itself!” Granny was always keeping things rolling.

Everyone gathered around the basket and began shucking. The others knew what they were doing, but I had never shucked corn. Watching Granny’s strong and nimble hands as I had done so many times this past week helped me master the technique.

“Shucking takes strength Katie me love. Take your time now peelin’ the husks away from the corn one at a time!”

Once the husks were removed, each ear of corn was covered with silky hairs, which also had to be removed. It was just another farm chore and once done, everyone told me I was a quick learner.



Chapter Twenty-Nine



## Chapter 30

For the next hour everyone helped to make the yard a “Fourth of July” party bonanza. Red, white and blue steamers hung everywhere...from the trees to the furniture. They covered the back of the house and surrounded every window. Granny and Ernie hung six American flags in special holders planted all over the yard. Some of the flags were very old and two of them were from the 1940s. They had only 48 stars since Hawaii and Alaska had not yet been named as states.

At 5:30 p.m. Mommy got home from her play date and gasped when she saw what the rest of us had accomplished without her.

“What exactly is going on here?” she asked hugging me in her mommy way.

“We’ll be havin’ our Fourth of July party a few days early is what!” Granny beamed.

“You are without a doubt, the best grandma a girl could ever want,” Mommy told Granny as she covered her up with another mommy hug.

Just then Daddy and Finn returned from their bonding day with six big clean trout. Fishing had definitely gone their way!

“Wow! Looks like a party around here,” Finn said.

“I better get the barbeque started,” Daddy said as he went to make that happen.

“Looks like a gala,” Sara said joining the rest of us. She had a big pot of baked beans that smelled scrumptious.

“You better be puttin’ those in the oven, Sara dear. We’ll be needin’ to keep them warm ‘til dinner,” Granny said as she hugged her with her loving Granny hands.

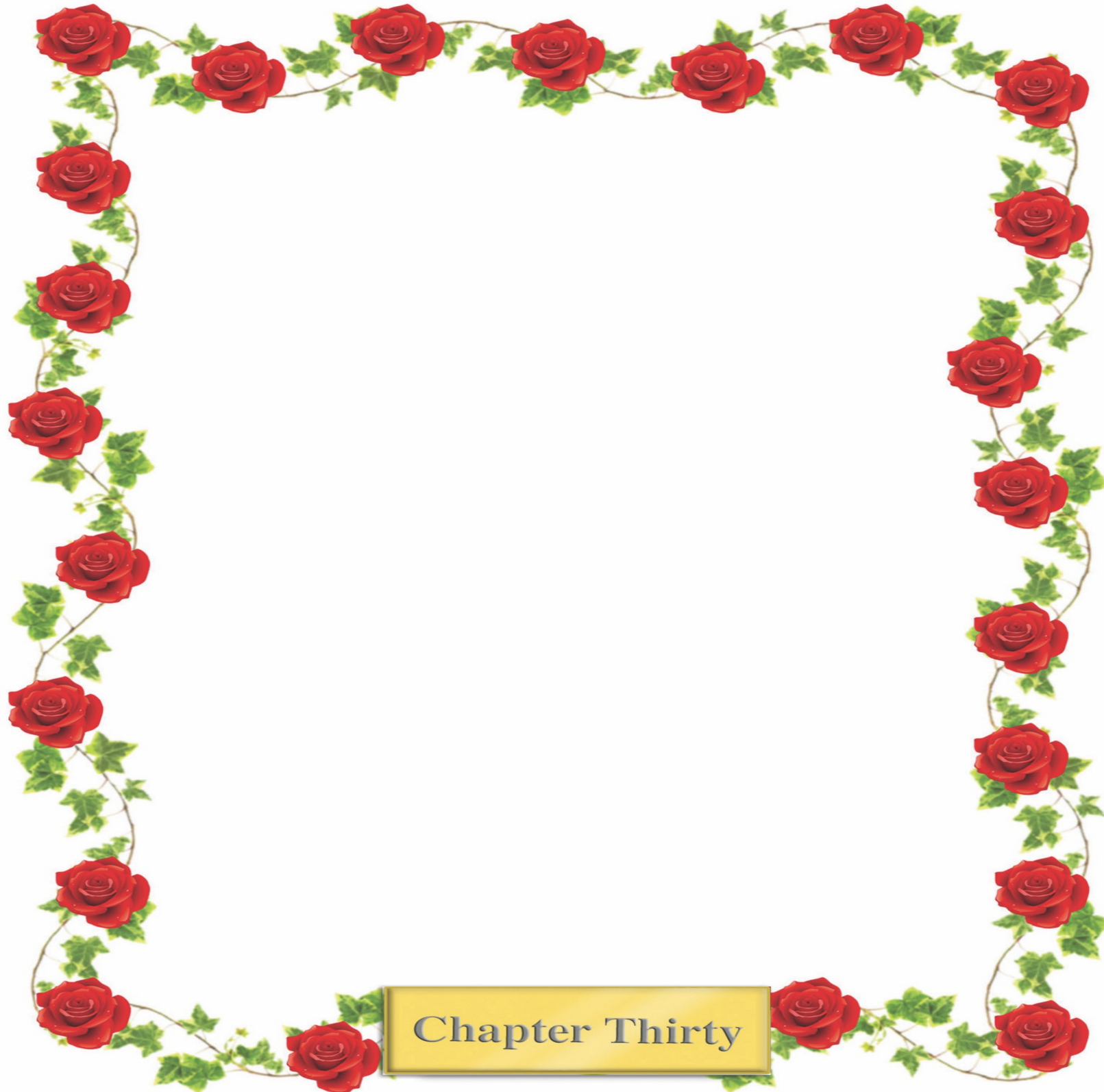
That night was a night to remember. We ate like pigs, and

laughed more than ever. We played music and sang a bunch of patriotic songs like you hear at ball games. I was hoarse by the time fireworks were displayed. This was Ernie's special talent and he set off one colorful and sparkling creation after another. The sky, usually beautiful enough with just stars, was now something out of the movies. It took my breath away...and everyone else's!

I know you must be growing tired of my saying I didn't want my vacation to end but it was the truth. It wasn't that what we were doing was anything out of the ordinary, really. It was all the love... of family, of friends and of Granny. No one does love better than Granny. She has a way of making everyone around her...people and animals alike, be the best that they can be. This feeling spreads and covers everyone like a big soft billowy cloud. There is no escaping it, and who would want to? I swear to God... there would be peace on this earth if we were all like my beautiful old Granny... scary hands and all.



Happy 4th of July!



Chapter Thirty



## Chapter 31...The Final Chapter

Beginnings and endings are a constant in this world. I am the type of person who doesn't like a great book to end, or a great movie, a great play date, or a great vacation, which the past week had been. I slept with Granny that last night in Iowa. She read me two stories that she herself had written at the age of ten. She had not only been the author but had also illustrated her little books. I have come to the conclusion that there is nothing Granny did not do in her long and full life.

"I'm a doer Katie and I love bein' busy makin my little dreams come true. There'll be plenty of time for accomplishin' all your dreams, too. I think you should be havin' lots of dreams darlin'...not just one or two."

I drifted off to sleep thinking of all my dreams and fully expecting to make each and every one come true.

When I awoke that final morning in Iowa, I was surprised beyond belief. Something was tickling my face. I thought it was a spider and I bolted upright. I looked around and saw Granny, Mommy, Daddy, Finn and Sara surrounding my bed. And there, on my lap, sat two adorable kittens, Bella's babies. Lulu was on the bed as well, taking great pride in her little niece and little nephew. Granny started laughing...so did we all. Mommy took pictures of this event... Finn did too, using his new antique camera to capture another memory.

"Are they mine...are they really mine?" I asked in disbelief.

"Sure and they're yours, Katie my love. You've come to be a very responsible farm girl and we all know you'll be takin' fine care of these babies!"

I was as happy as happy could be and gave everyone the

biggest hugs and kisses ever.

“I will Granny, I promise. You babies are going to love living in our house in California!” I told the kitties as I gathered them up in my arms.

And then it hit me...like getting hit in the stomach by a well-kicked soccer ball. The end was here. This was it. I ran to my Granny and started to cry so hard that I couldn't catch my breath.

“It can't be over, Granny. I don't want to leave you!” I cried and cried and cried and nothing could stop my river of tears.

My family tried their best to console me. But, the harder they all tried, the harder I cried. The only one who didn't speak was my granny. She held me tight and stroked my head with her soft and gentle touch as everyone else tiptoed out of the room. There was something unspoken that passed between the two of us. Eventually my tears stopped falling.

Granny looked down at me and with tears in her eyes said, “Well now that was quite a cleansing my sweet Katie. We are two peas in a pod and that's for sure. But I have the advantage of knowin' that endings are followed by great beginnings.”

She put my hand in hers and led me to my two little kittens. She picked them up, then handed one to me. “To new beginnings,” Granny declared and we toasted our kitties as if they were glasses of champagne.

Right on cue, the kitties started to meow in celebration of their new beginning and Granny and I burst out laughing. The sadness was gone and joy had replaced it.

Mommy, Daddy, kitties and I left Bedford, Iowa in

our beautiful house on wheels that morning, promising Sara, Finn and Ernie that, for sure, we would be returning to Granny's farm next summer. Daddy set Granny's computer up with Skype and, by lunchtime, we had face timed twice. In fact, all the way home, through Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and, finally, California, Granny and I had skyped about everything and anything that was or wasn't important.

The kitties and I bonded and by the time we arrived in Manhattan Beach, my hometown, they had their names...Lizzie "2" and Toby,"2", in honor of Lizzie "1" and Toby "1". They were lots of fun and kept me from feeling too sad about leaving my farm girl life behind.

Granny had taught me so much and had changed my life forever. I didn't want to hurt my parents' feelings but I had a new role model in my life...Granny. I wanted to be just like her... in every way. Most of all, I planned to work hard to have hands as comforting, cleaver, and as gifted as hers. It no longer was about how those hands looked. They were...and are...valuable hands, loving hands, healing hands...and, best of all, they are on my Granny!



Chapter Thirty-One

**Granny's Hands is the 5th in a series of children's books I have written over the years. It is a story based upon my Great Grandmother's wonderful life on her farm in Iowa. It is about her relationships with people and animals alike. It is also about her many gifts, including her extraordinary healing hands. But, most of all, it is a love story between a granny and her eight year's old great granddaughter.**

**In addition, Granny's Hands is an experience in art. Each short chapter ends with a frame...the pallet upon which the reader may interpret visually what he or she has just read.**

**Having been an elementary school teacher, a massage therapist and now a novice writer, I am living in Marina Del Rey, California, with my husband, Brooks. My books for children represent, at the age of 68, my dream of becoming a published author.**

**A special thanks goes to my friend, Mike Goldstein. As the illustrator of all my books, he has created the cover for this book and has handled the layout for the text and frames within which you, the illustrator, shall do your magic. Have fun!**

