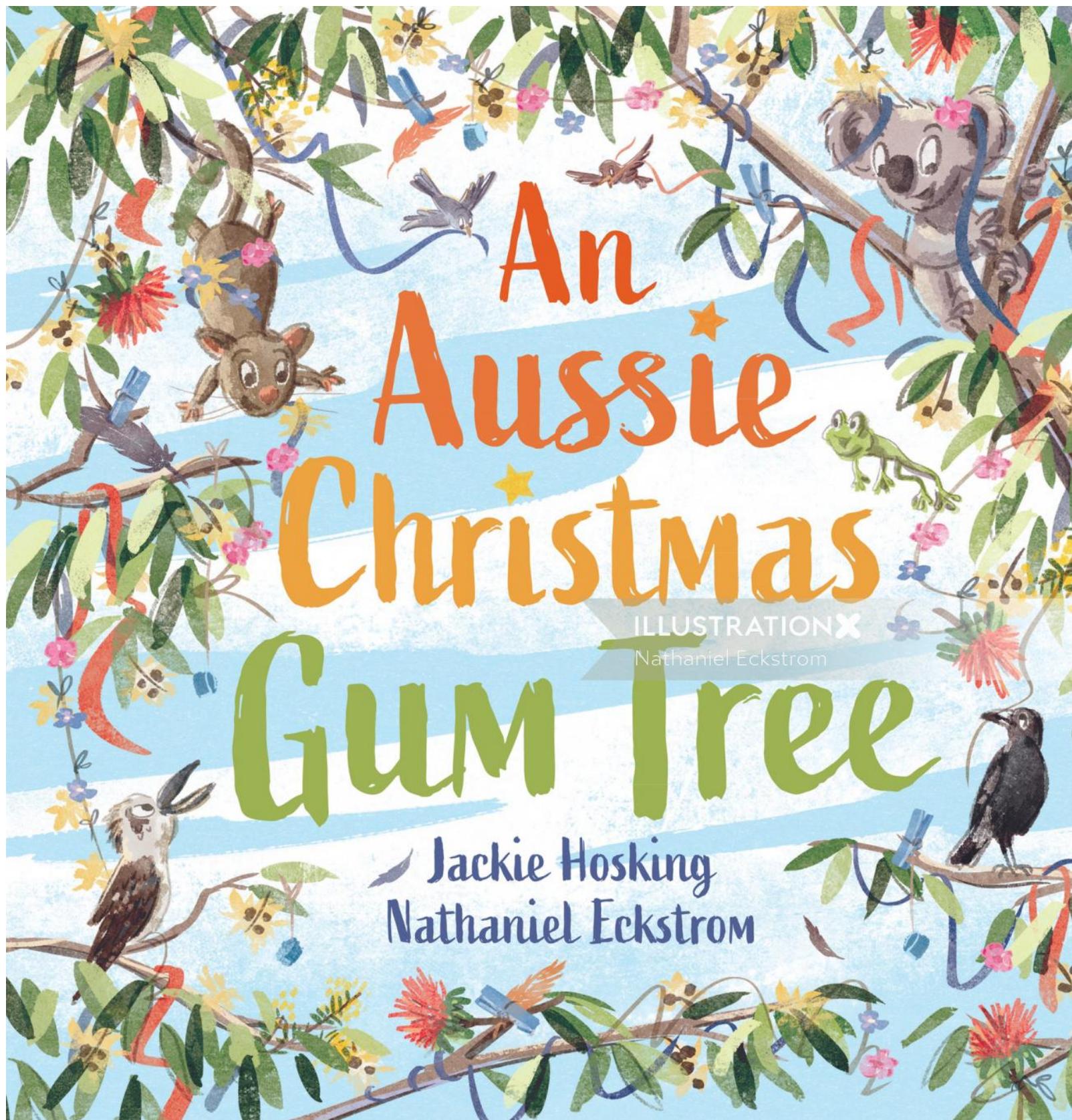


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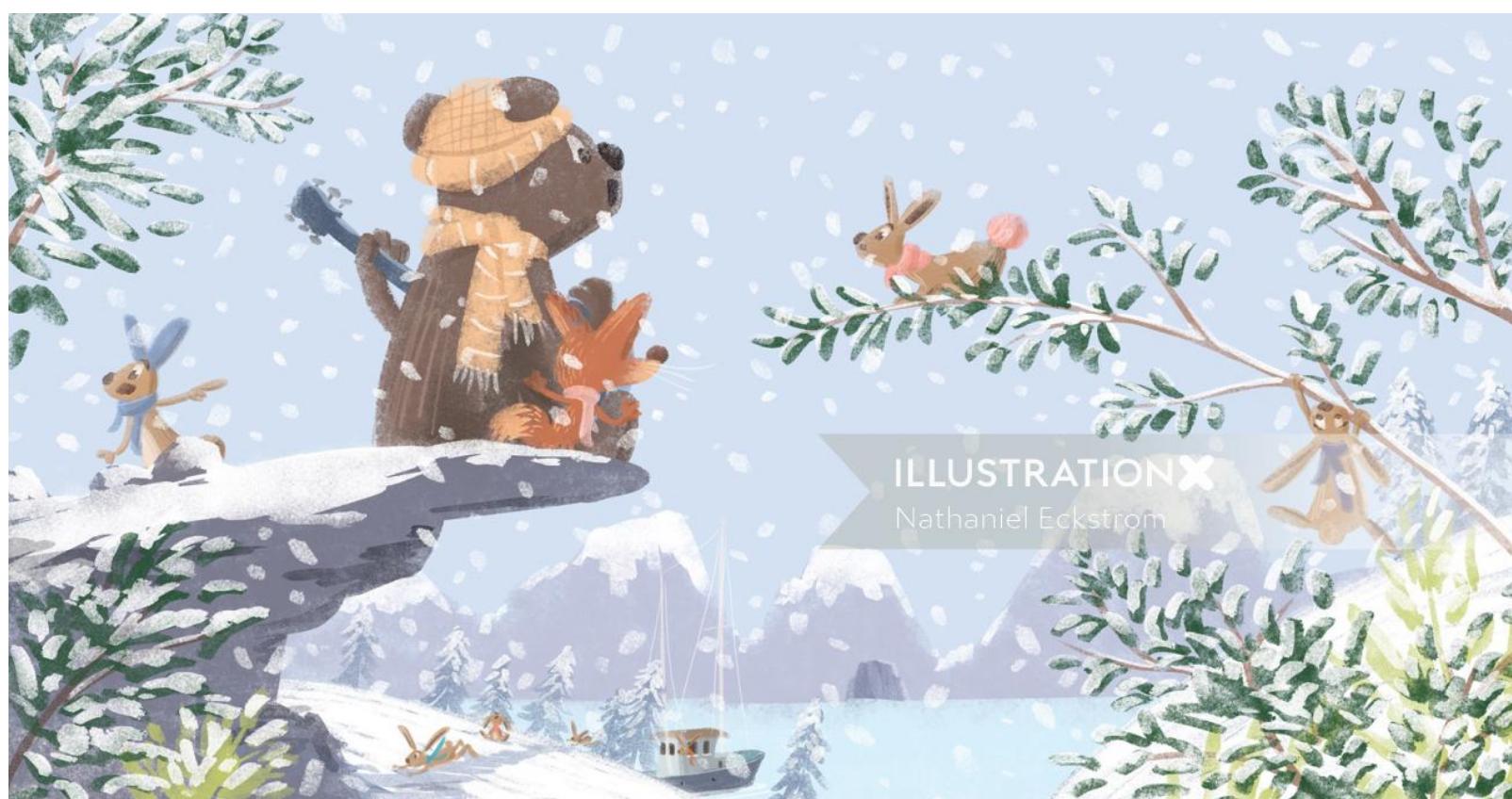
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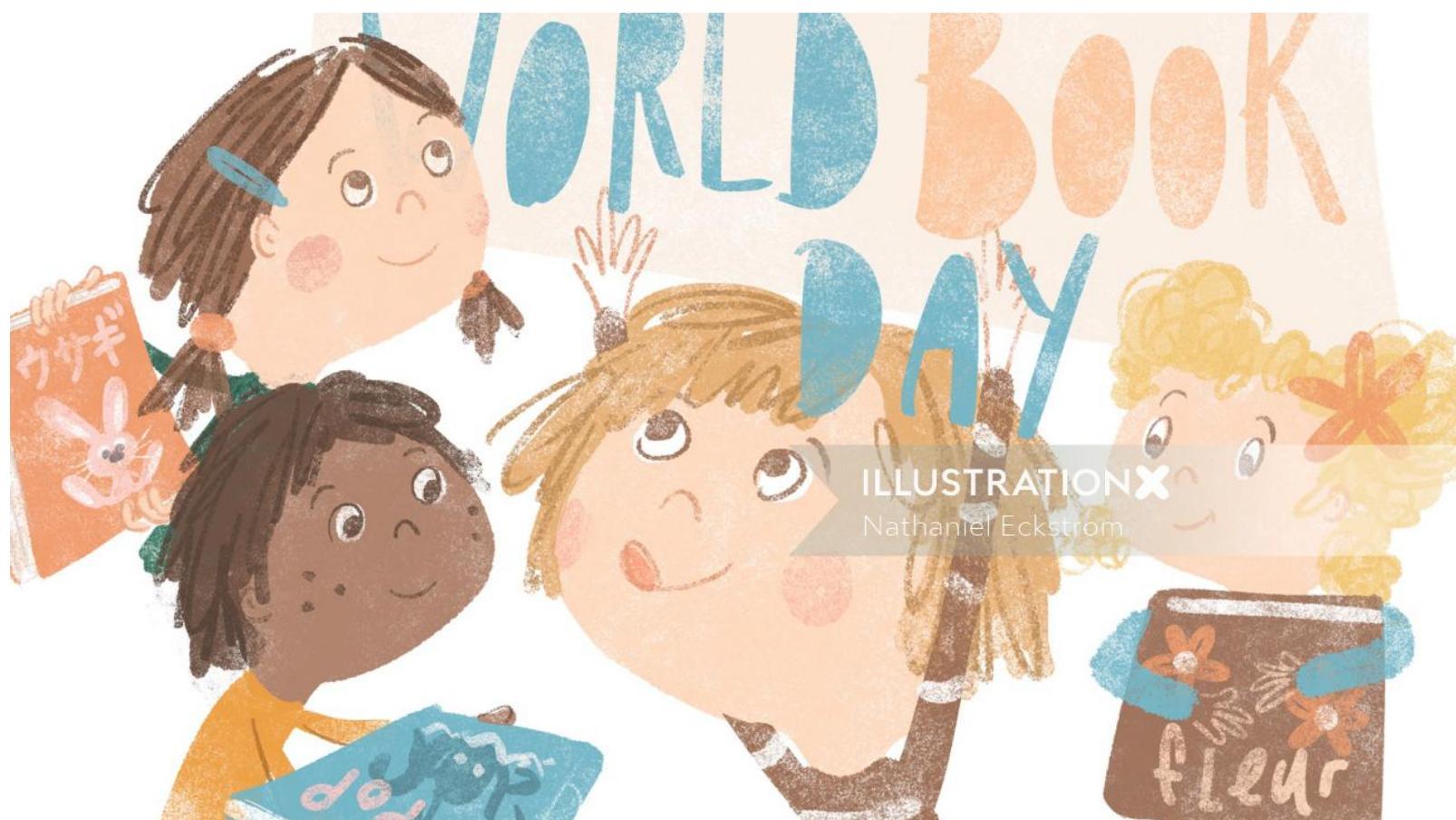
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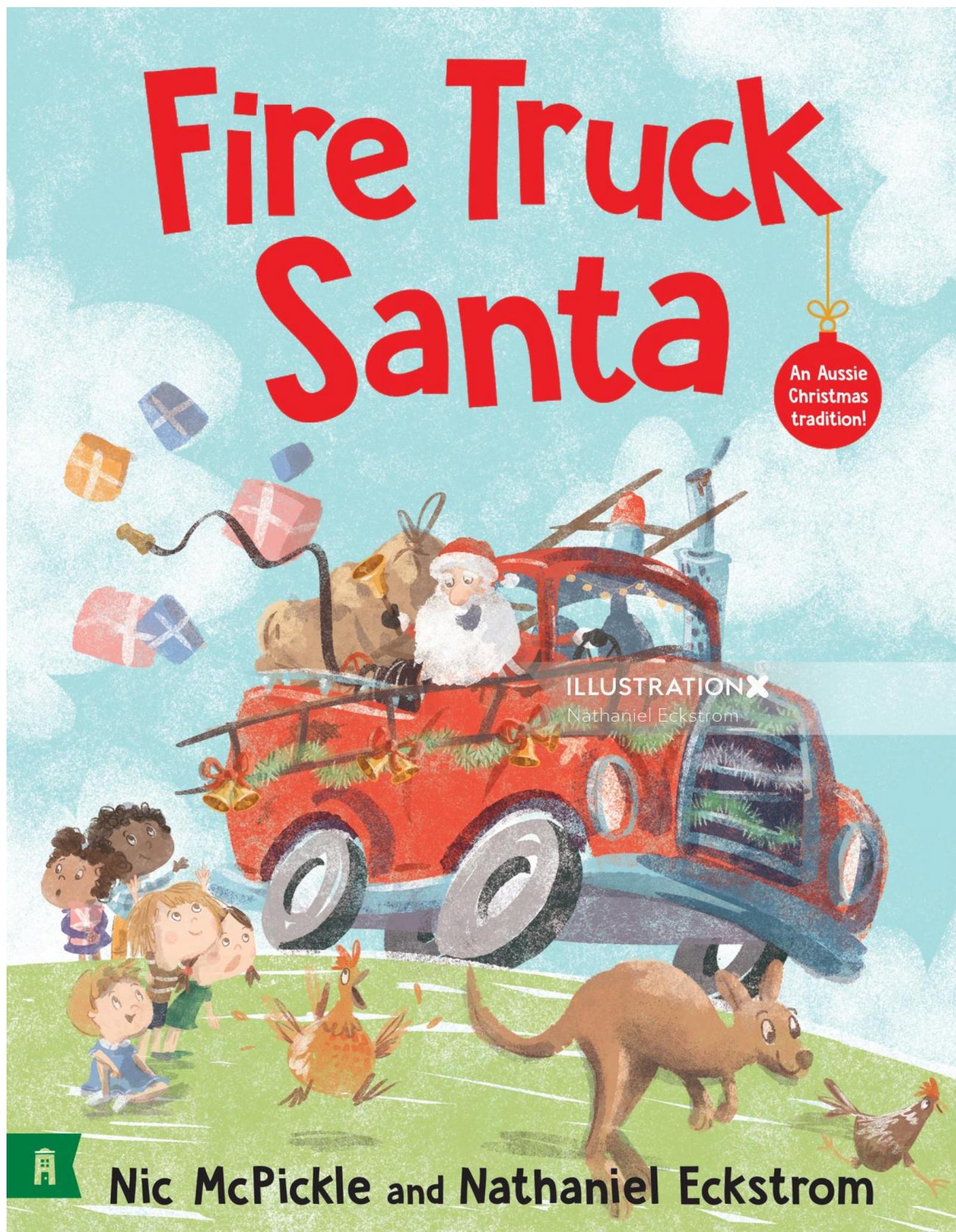
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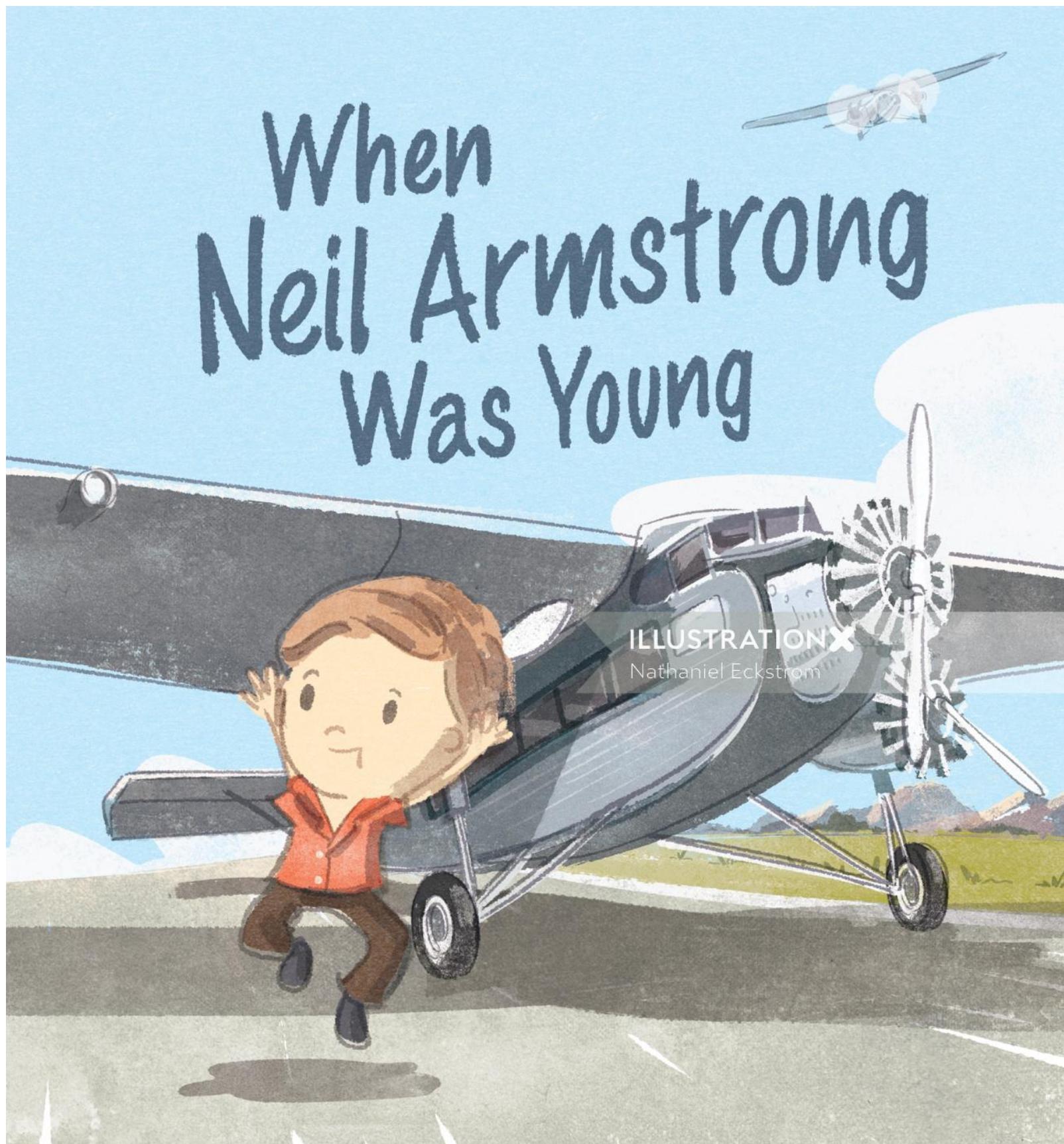
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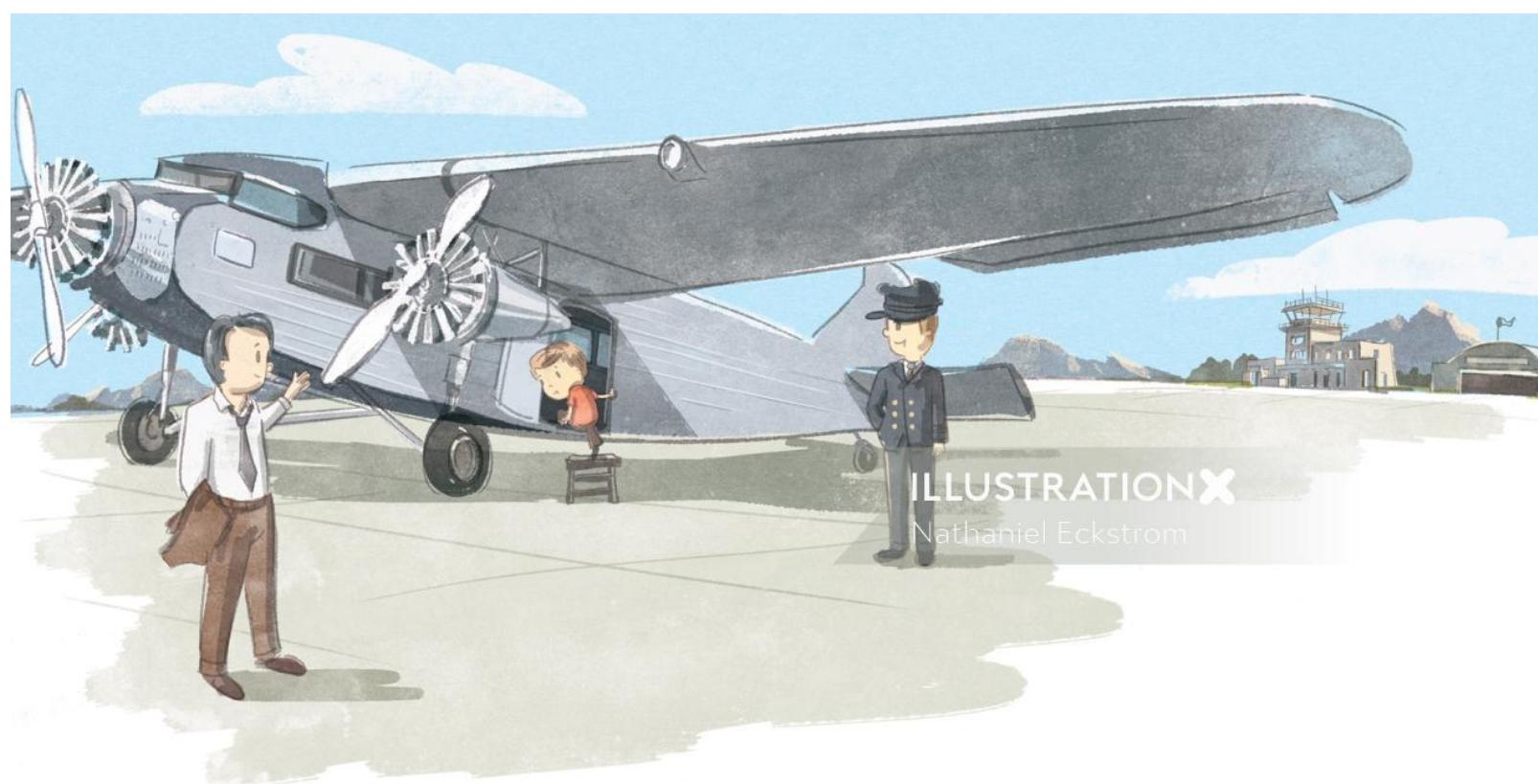
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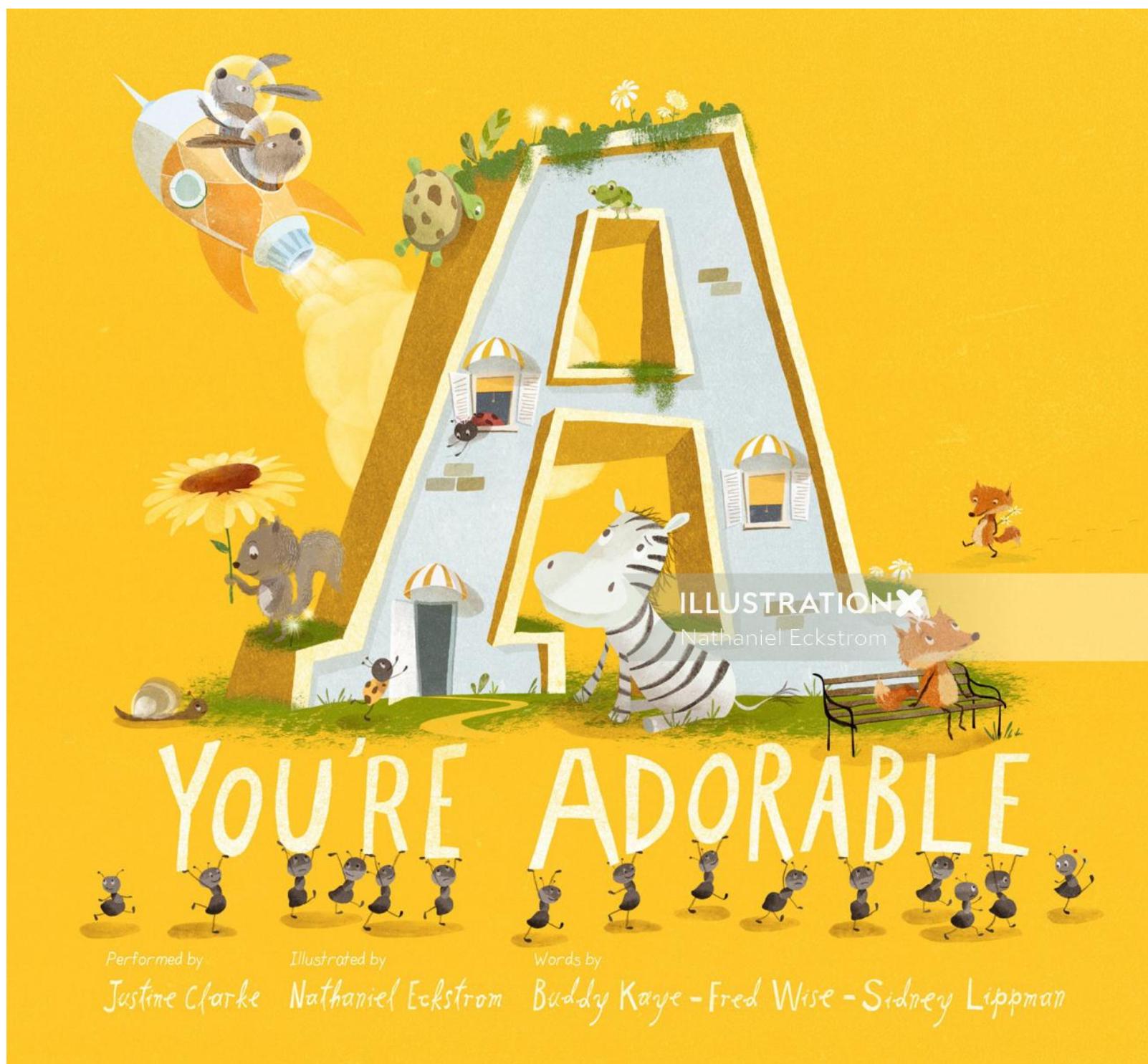
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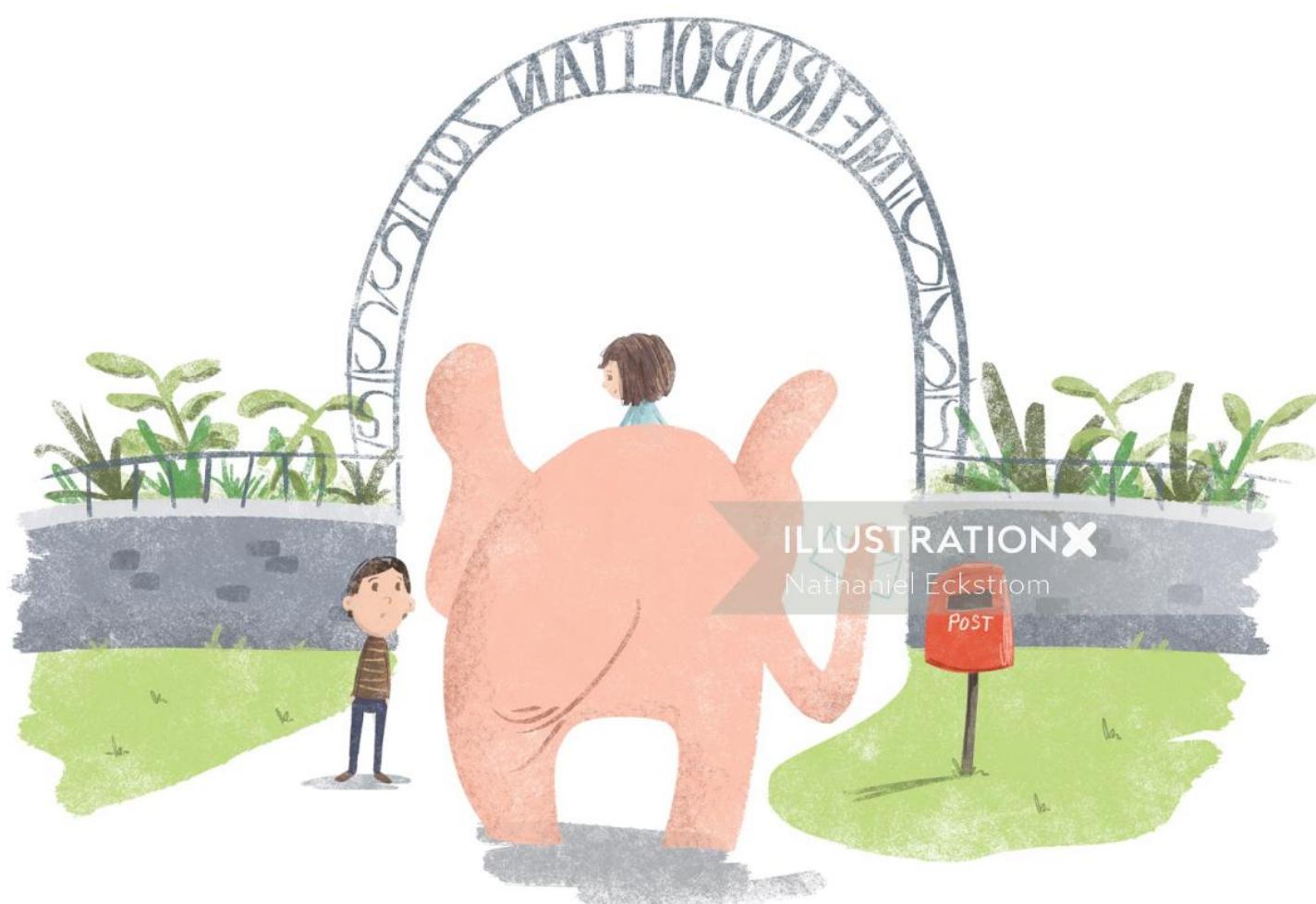
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## A Happy Song

by Nathaniel Eckstrom



19

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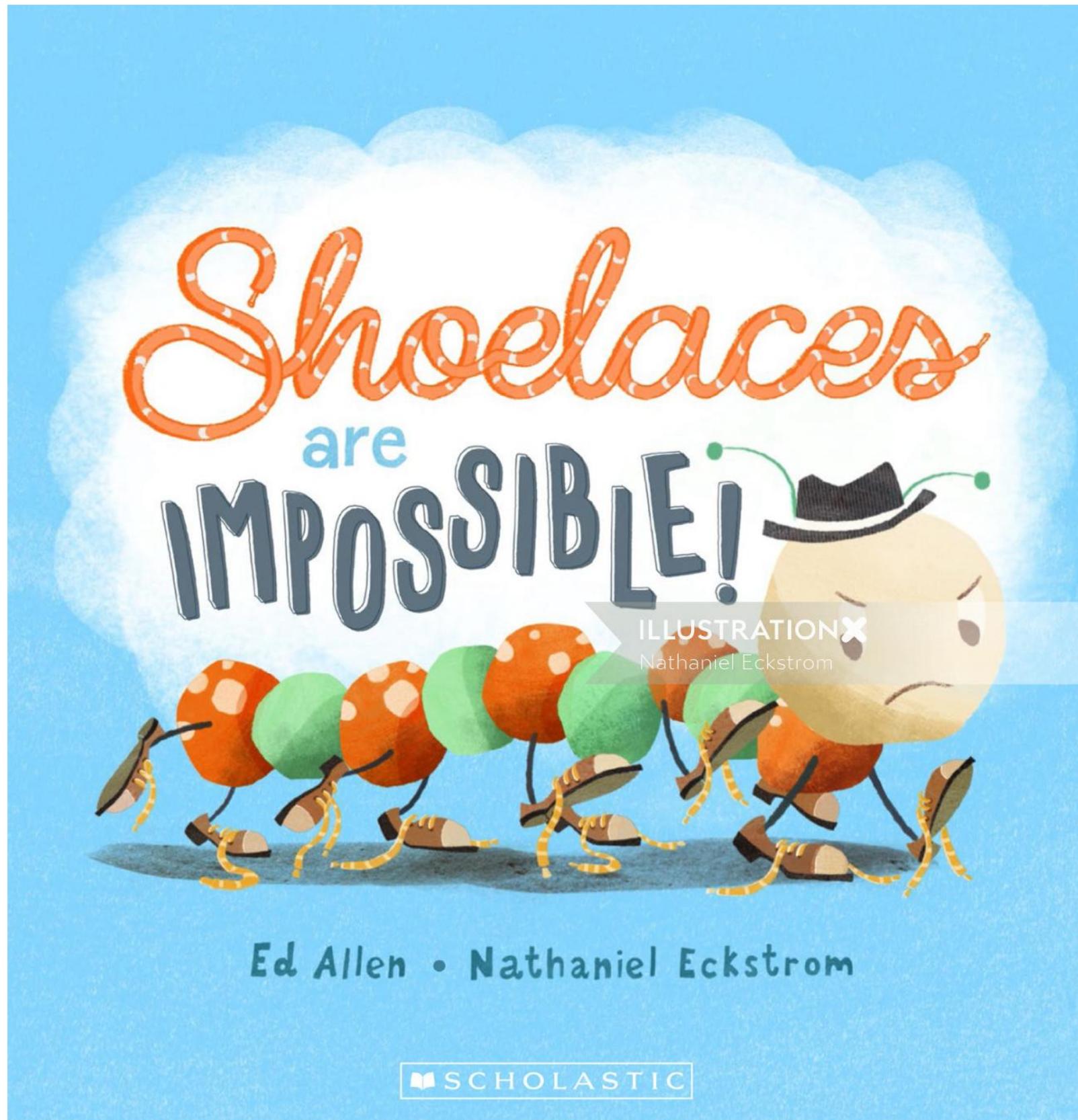
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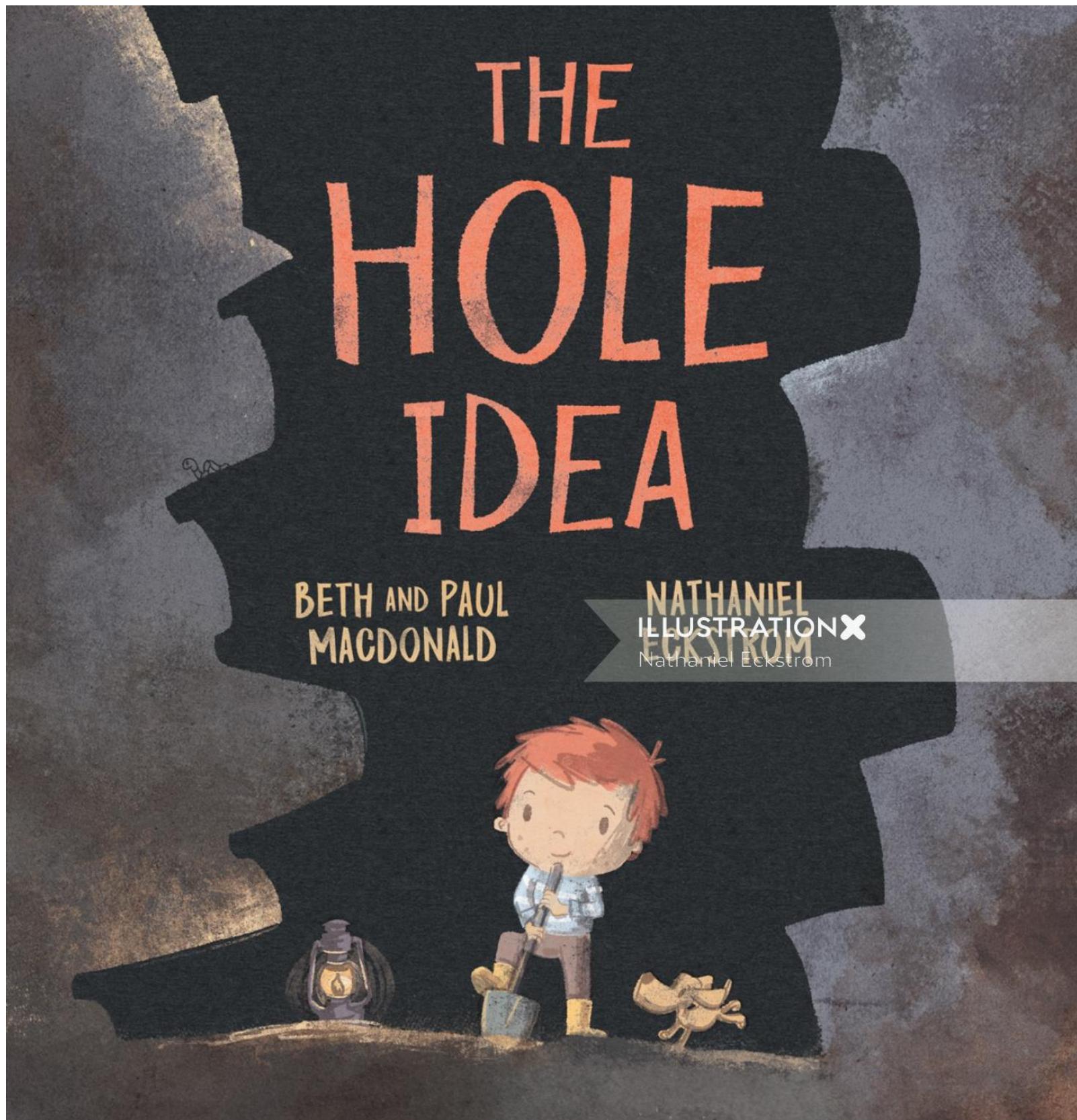
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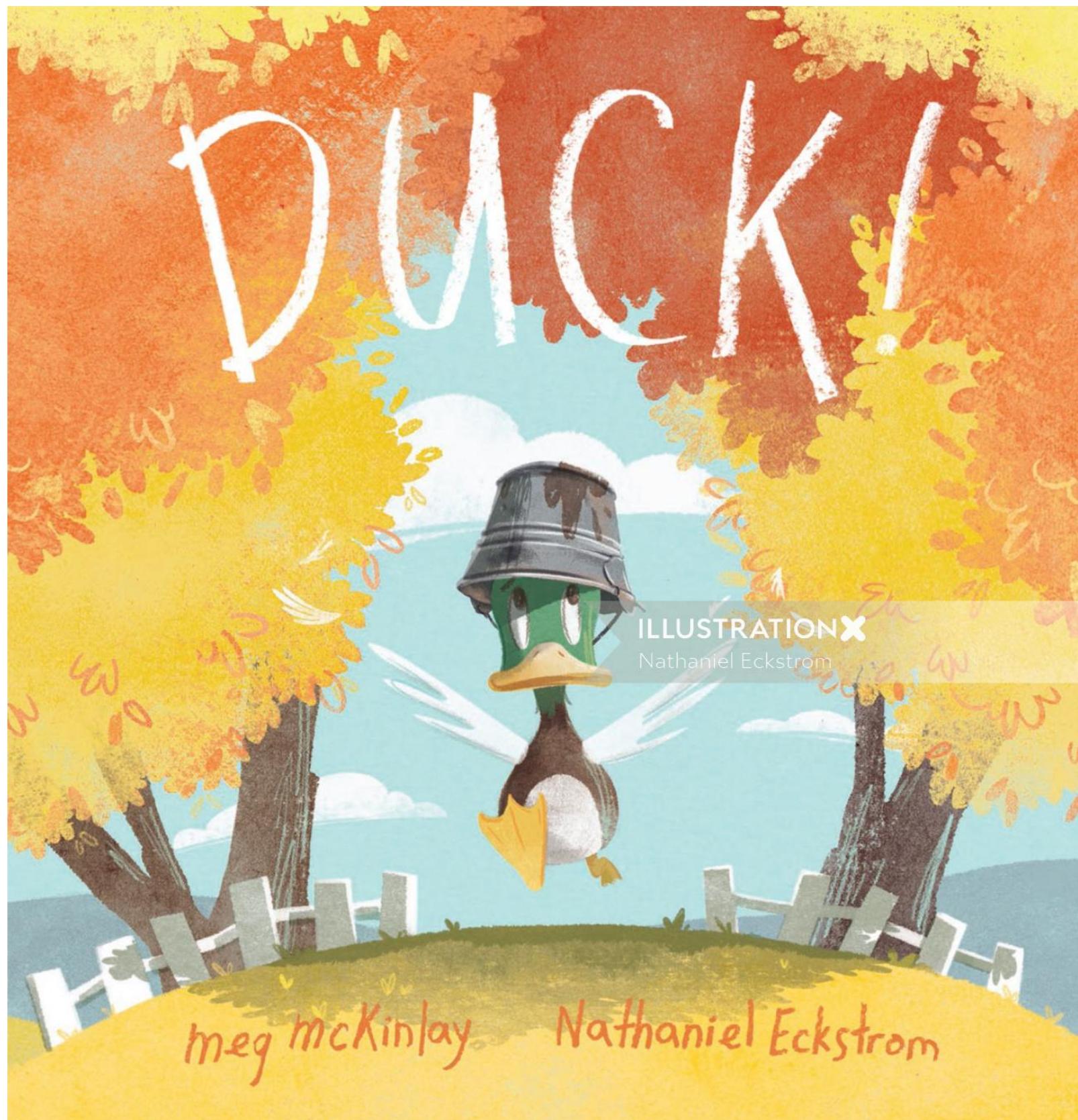
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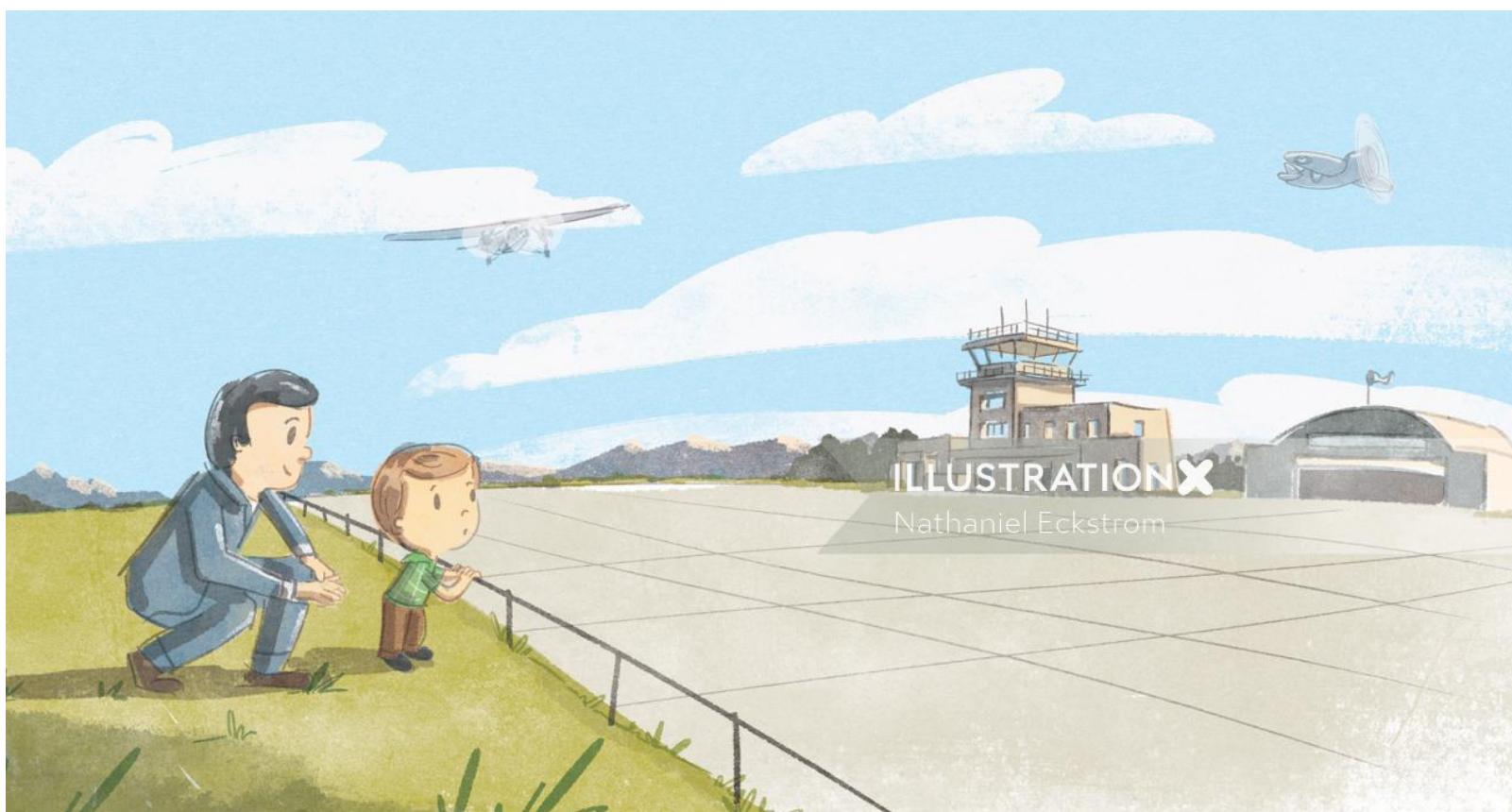
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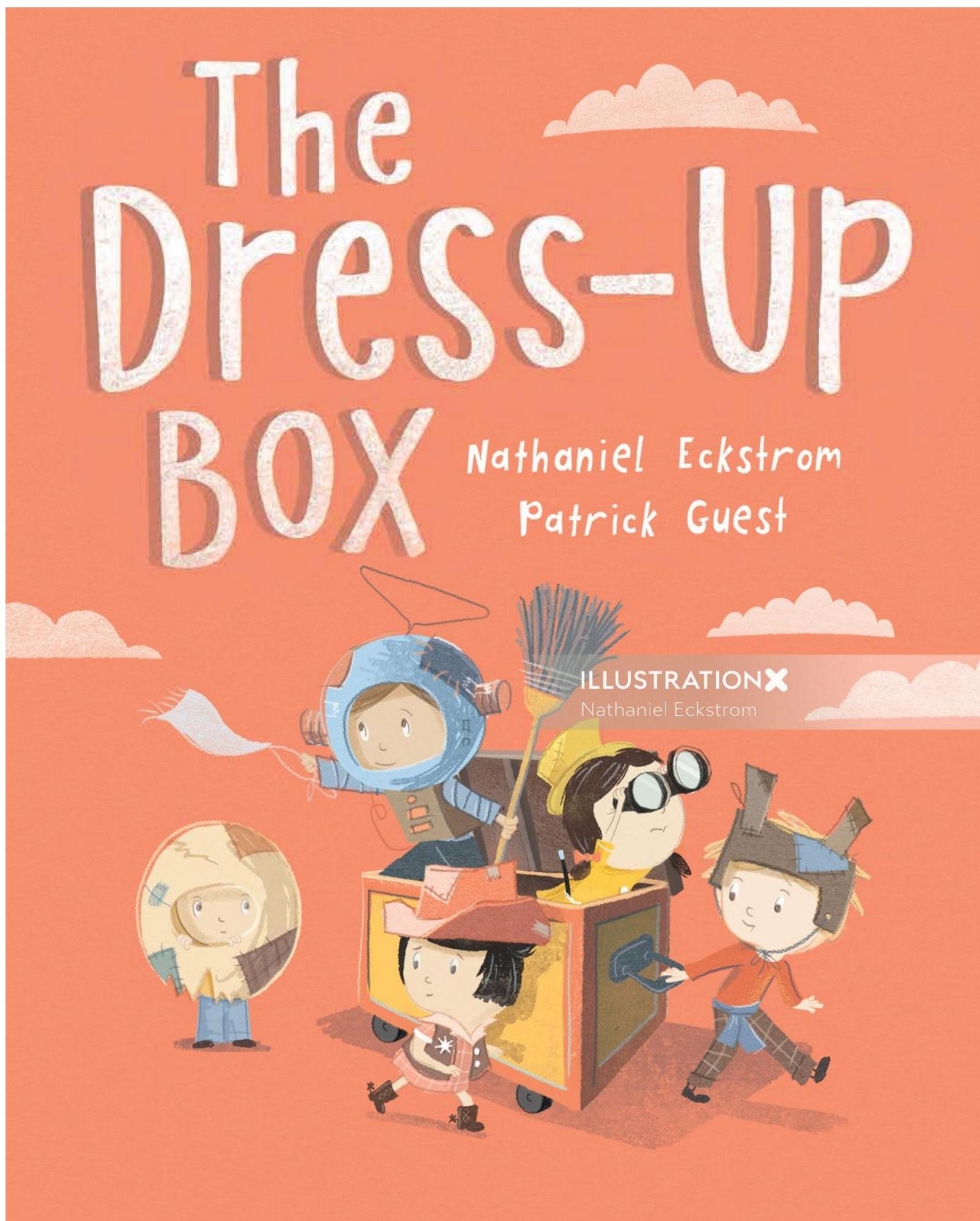
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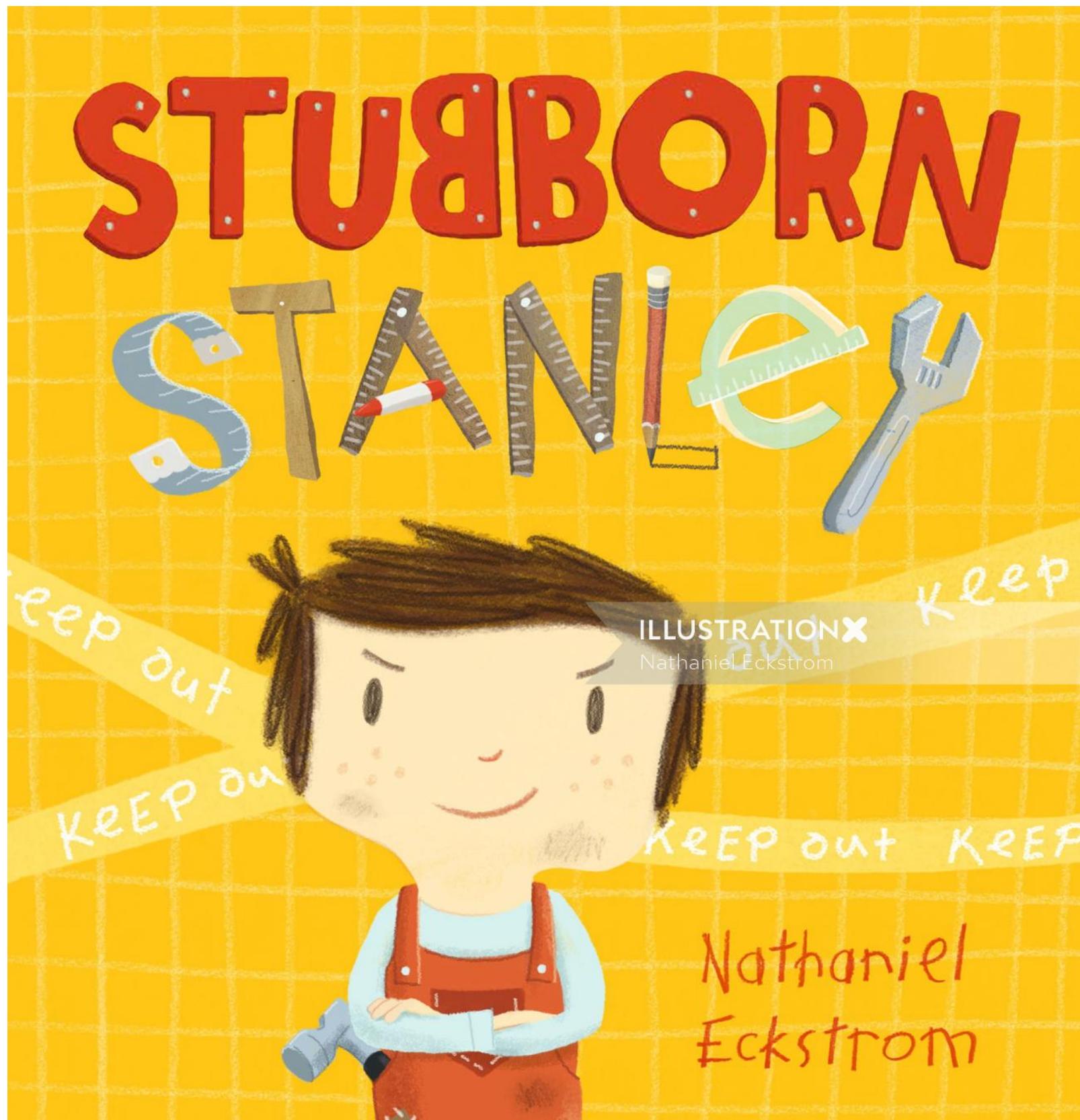
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## In search of Marcel's madeleines

In 2018, food writer Felicity Cloake toured France by bicycle on a quest to discover the country's many regional specialities. In this extract from her book, *One More Croissant for the Road*, she arrives in Commercy, home to Proust's famous cakes

We're firmly in big sky country: sprawling farms, villages strung out along the horizon, hedged round a church and everywhere shining green thanks to the last six weeks of rain. For a while there are just a few distant hills on the horizon, and then, startlingly, as we turn towards Troussey, I spot what appear to be the White Cliffs of Dover looming to the north, which eventually give way to a steep drop into a somewhat anticlimactic gigantic quarry: a sign we've now left the Vosges mountains behind and are entering the chalky plains of Champagne, home to some of the world's most expensive grapes.

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England are playing Panama this afternoon, and as my cycling sidekick Gemma and I pull into Commercy, make do with a quick stop at a local supermarket into a bar, screwing the match – to, it must be said, a distinct lack of interest from the drinkers within. It's already 2-0 to England, 25 minutes in, so I brave the madeleine-themed tourist trap of a bakery on the other side of the square, packed like a sardine tin at a Sunday afternoon. Perhaps they're feeling the football.

The shelves of A la Cloche Lorraine are laden with prettily packaged boxes of cakes, tied with red string, alongside tins of butter biscuits – it seems La Cloche is owned by the St Michel group, whose

biscuit factory I passed on my way to Mont Saint-Michel a month ago. While I have nothing against big business, I do dislike quite so much of it being tied up in such a tight knot. I'm not sure if it's from her match and we head to the rather less picturesque La Boîte à Madeleines instead, which, despite being located in a light industrial estate on the outskirts of town, proves a much more satisfying experience. They're busy baking some of the 10,000 cakes they produce every single day. I'm not sure if it's the heat or the fact, often, an employee pops out with a tray warm from the oven for the punters to try. A screen suspended from the ceiling flashes the ingredients that go into every thousand: 10kg flour, 7kg butter, 5kg sugar,

700g honey, 520g baking powder, 200g lemon juice, 160g Breton sea salt – and somewhat less obviously, 1kg sorbitol, a sugar substitute, 1kg cornstarch, and 800g trimolite, an inverted sugar syrup that creates a softer, longer-lasting final product, something I will be thankful for in a few days' time. Eggs aren't listed for some reason, though I see some go in on the video.) The woman explaining the process stresses the importance of

a blithely hot oven in achieving the correct degree of browning: take them slightly darker than you might think is desirable, she says, then eat them up quick. It's true, even theirs don't taste as good once they've been packaged up for sale.

Refusing to a corner to discreetly stuff my mouth with fresh ones, I find myself staring into the handsome face of Duke Stanislas, who, according to this rather romantic cartoon, is responsible for the madeleine's success. When his pastry chef fell ill before a party, it claims a buxom maid stepped in to save the day. The Duke, depicted as a d'Artagnan-like figure with a rakish feather in his hat and a wide-brimmed hat, was so impressed by her cakes (or perhaps by Madeleine herself, with her low-cut dress and big blue eyes) that he named them after her – a legend was born.

Legend or fable, they go on in connection with this in a 40-page sequence in Marcel Proust's epic novel

In the first volume, the narrator eats one of these "squat, plump little cakes", which eventually prompts a flood of childhood memory. "No sooner had the warmth of the cake with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me," he writes.

A recently discovered early draft of the text suggests that the original trigger was actually honey on toast. Fortunately for Commercy, if not for honey producers, Proust changed it.

It's time for a hot run up to the town of Bar-le-Duc, 45km away, so we buy a bottle of Mirabelle de Commercy as well as a big bag of madeleines with booze-soaked plums in case of medical emergency en route. How pleased I am

to be carrying the extra weight when we run into the first climb: a leg-trembler that isn't improved by a group of gormless tourists who are cycling up it slowly into view, stand howling in the middle of the road, before deliberately moving into my path as I swerve to avoid them. I can only hope my "BONJOUR messieurs-dames", delivered with all the menace of an aggressive British "sorry", proves sufficiently galling to make up for the inter-sped cyclist road-mixing.

The group decides to take more than a single lane through the trees, dropping and climbing with gay abandon, and it's bloody good fun. Leaving the woods behind, we ascend a long, slow hill up to what looks like a shady copse at the edge of a field, but turns out to be an enormous pile of manure bursting with flies. I'm too busy trying to ride through my jersey, only to be slain by a helpful hand almost knocking me off my bike from behind. Gemma proving her worth yet again.

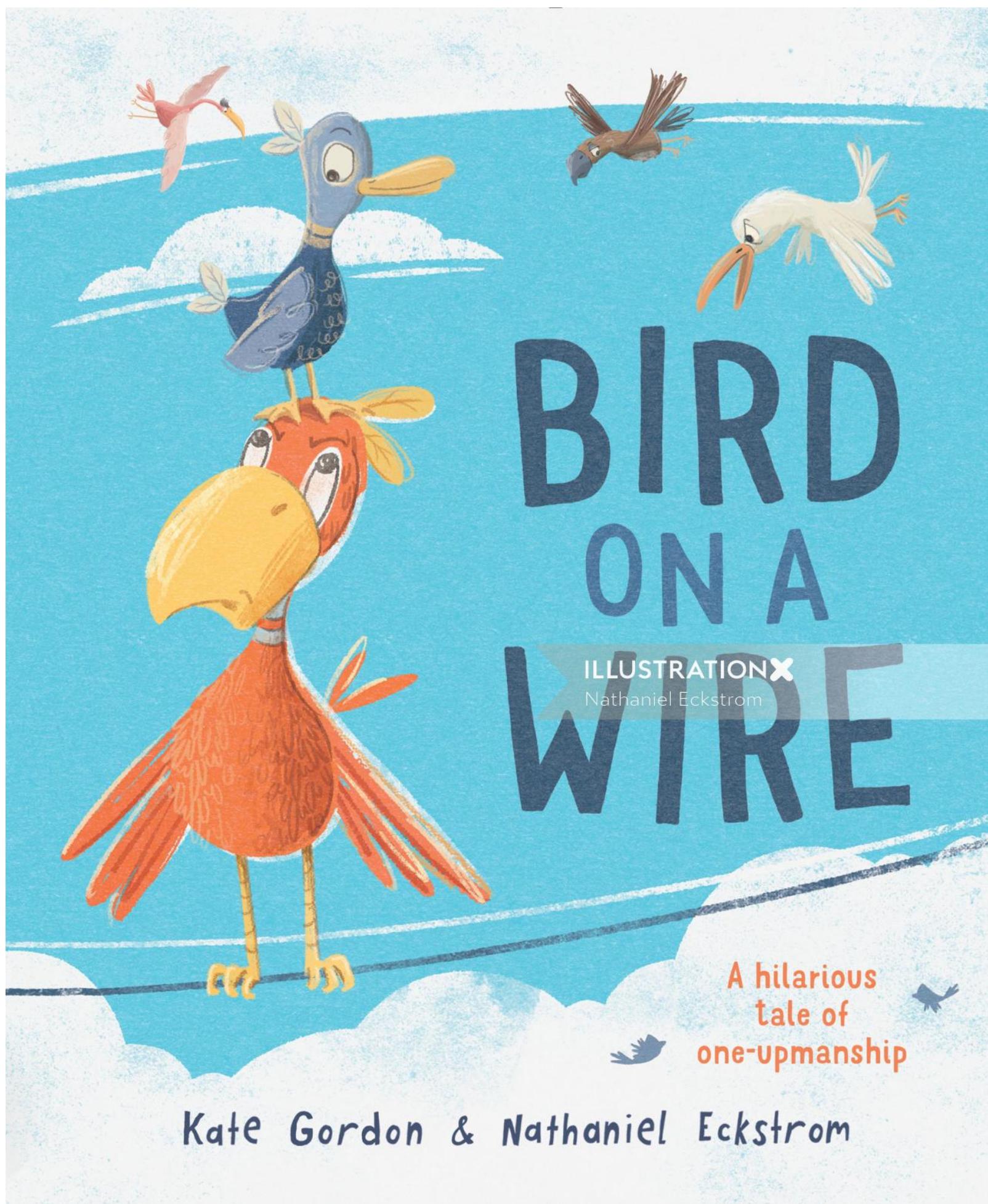
"I brave the madeleine-themed tourist trap of a bakery, packed like a sardine tin on a Sunday afternoon"



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**Hop Up and JUMP UP**  
Shaker Song Art by Nathaniel Eckstrom

C

**G**

Hop up and jump up and whirl round, whirl round.

Gath - er love, here it is, all round, all round.

F C

Here is love, flow - ing round. Catch it as you whirl round.

F C

Reach up and reach down, here it is, all round.

The sheet music features four staves of musical notation in G major and common time. The lyrics are integrated into the music. The background of the page is a colorful winter scene with children playing in the snow, a squirrel, a bird, and a small house.

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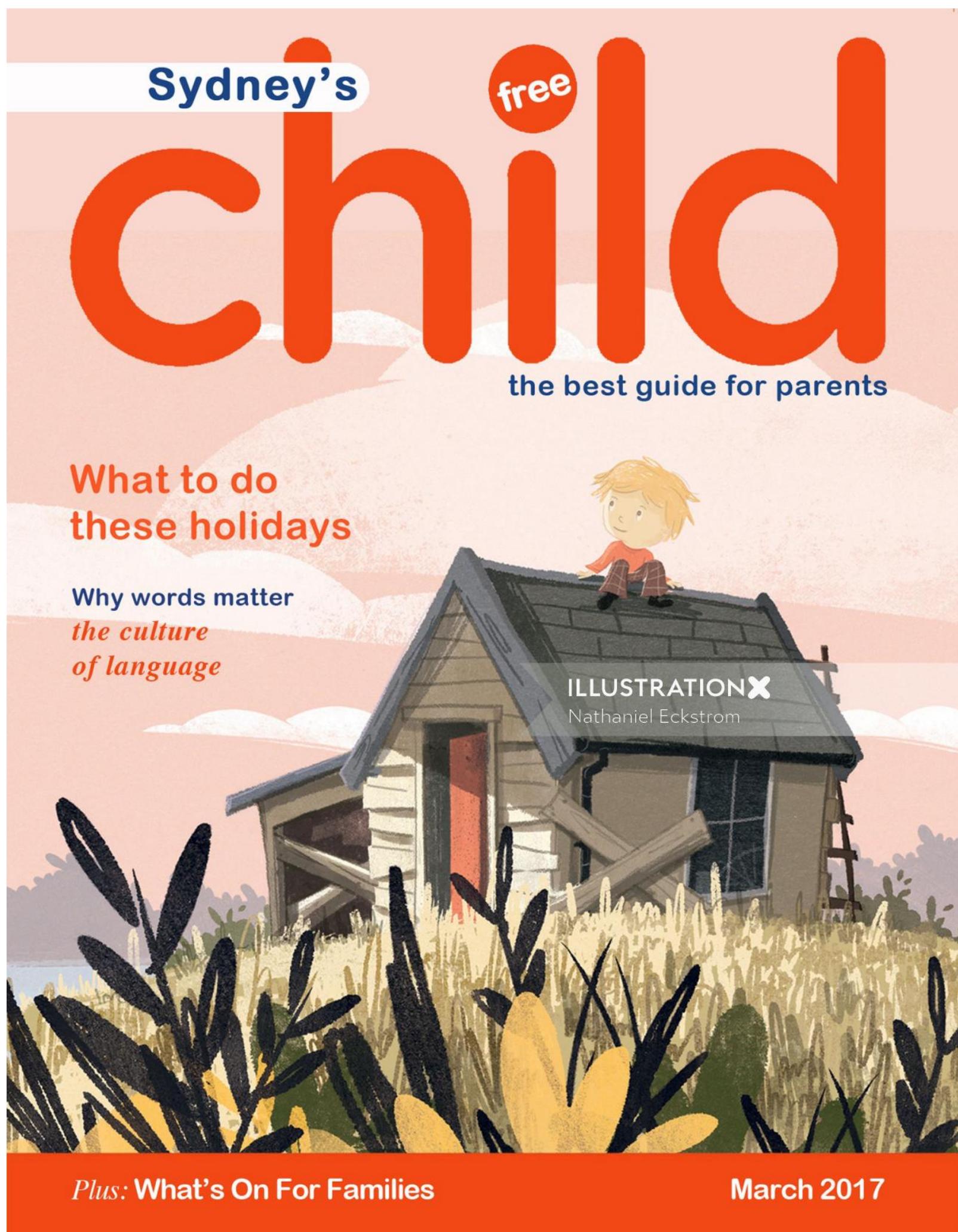
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