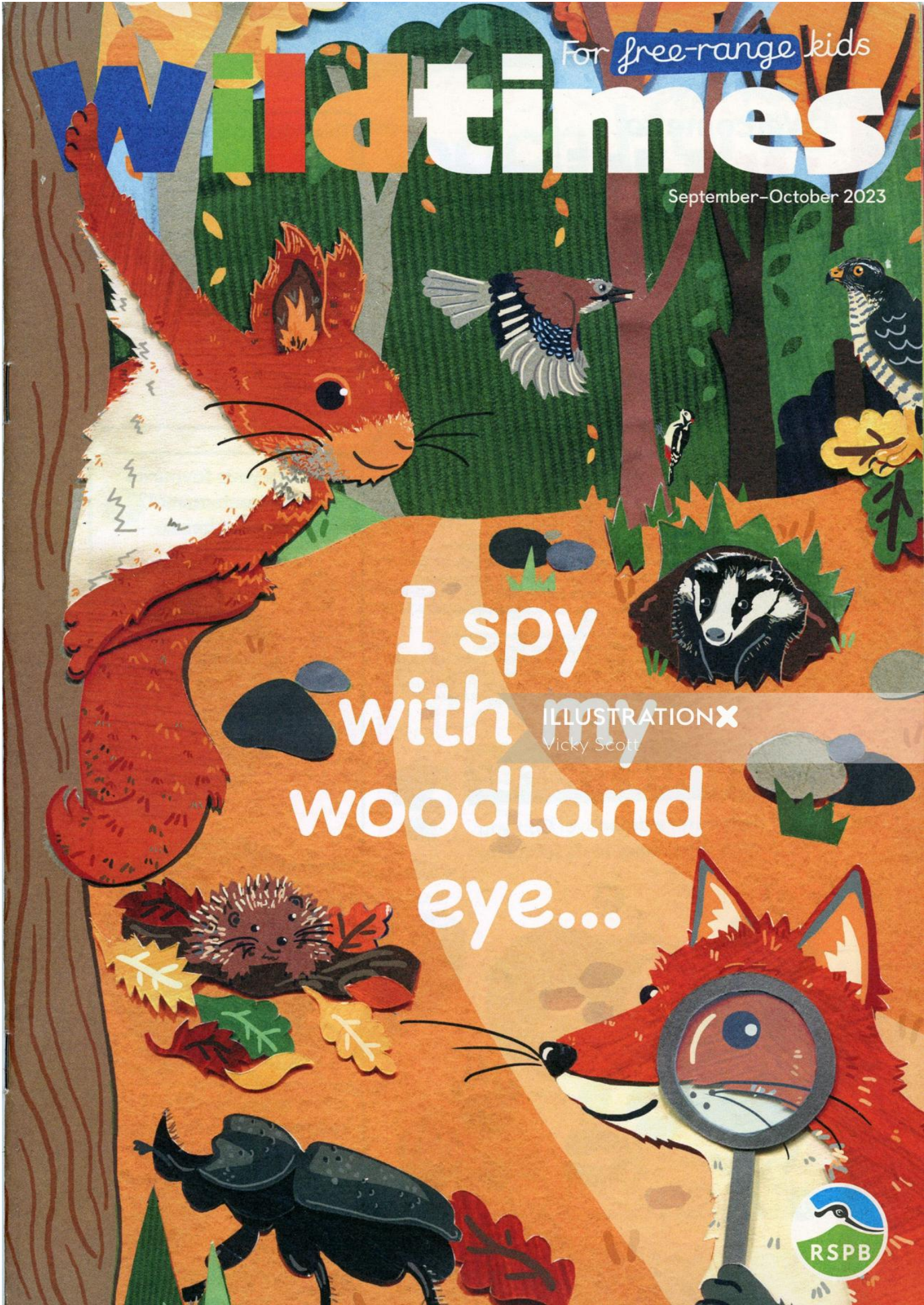


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Create your Own Walking Tour!

Uncover hidden stories about your community

BY SELAH ULMER / ILLUSTRATIONS BY VICKY SCOTT

Have you ever imagined what it would be like to be an explorer? To go on a treasure hunt, to discover hidden historical stories and to share your findings with your friends and family? This spring, become an explorer in your own neighborhood. You can do this by designing a walking tour.

A walking tour is exactly what it sounds like: a tour that you plan yourself and lead on foot. The details that go into creating it include planning the route, discovering and deciding on the information to include—historical stories or natural curiosities—and getting the word out to your friends and family.

Darrin Crow is a professional storyteller and tour guide. He has more than 30 years of experience and started giving tours when he was 16 years old. Here are his tips for giving spectacular tours: >

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What should we look for when selecting stops on our neighborhood tours?
When it comes to selecting stops, look for what interests you. As you walk the area, what sticks out? Search for questions and mysteries. Look at maps from decades ago to see how the area has grown and changed. There are lots of places to find these stories. The reference section at the library may have county history books as well as city history books. Discovering the stories and fun facts that interest you will help make sure they interest your guests.

How do you create a walking tour?
I suppose the first consideration is how long it will be, both time and distance. I've found an hour or so is a good length of time. Then think of where you want the tour to go. What do you want to highlight—physically, historically and story-wise? There isn't time to cover everything, so what are the key things you want your guests to learn, experience, enjoy and appreciate? Those are good basic guiding questions. And notes are a wonderful thing. None of this has to be memorized. A bullet-point list or an outline with the main facts of each stop is great.

What is challenging about creating a tour?
The challenge comes in finding the information to share. It is important that the tour contain stories, not just the bare facts. We need to know about the people who made the place, not just the dates of stuff.

What are the benefits of giving tours?
Telling people stories about the places where they live helps them make connections to those places. It helps them value these places and see that they are places to love. We build community and find common ground. Also, people attach more value to the things we tell stories about and know. We learn about what happened—the stories of perseverance, triumph and greatness, and the stories of failures and tragedies.

What do you like about being a tour guide?
The fun part of being a tour guide is getting to visit with people. I always ask people to chime in with things they know about what we are seeing, since I don't know it all and haven't lived it all. Often the people on the tour have their own stories of the places we see. I enjoy being able to help people see new things in the ordinary stuff around them.

Selah Ulmer is a writer in Iowa. She holds a Master of Divinity degree and is the author of a book for young women headed to or in college.

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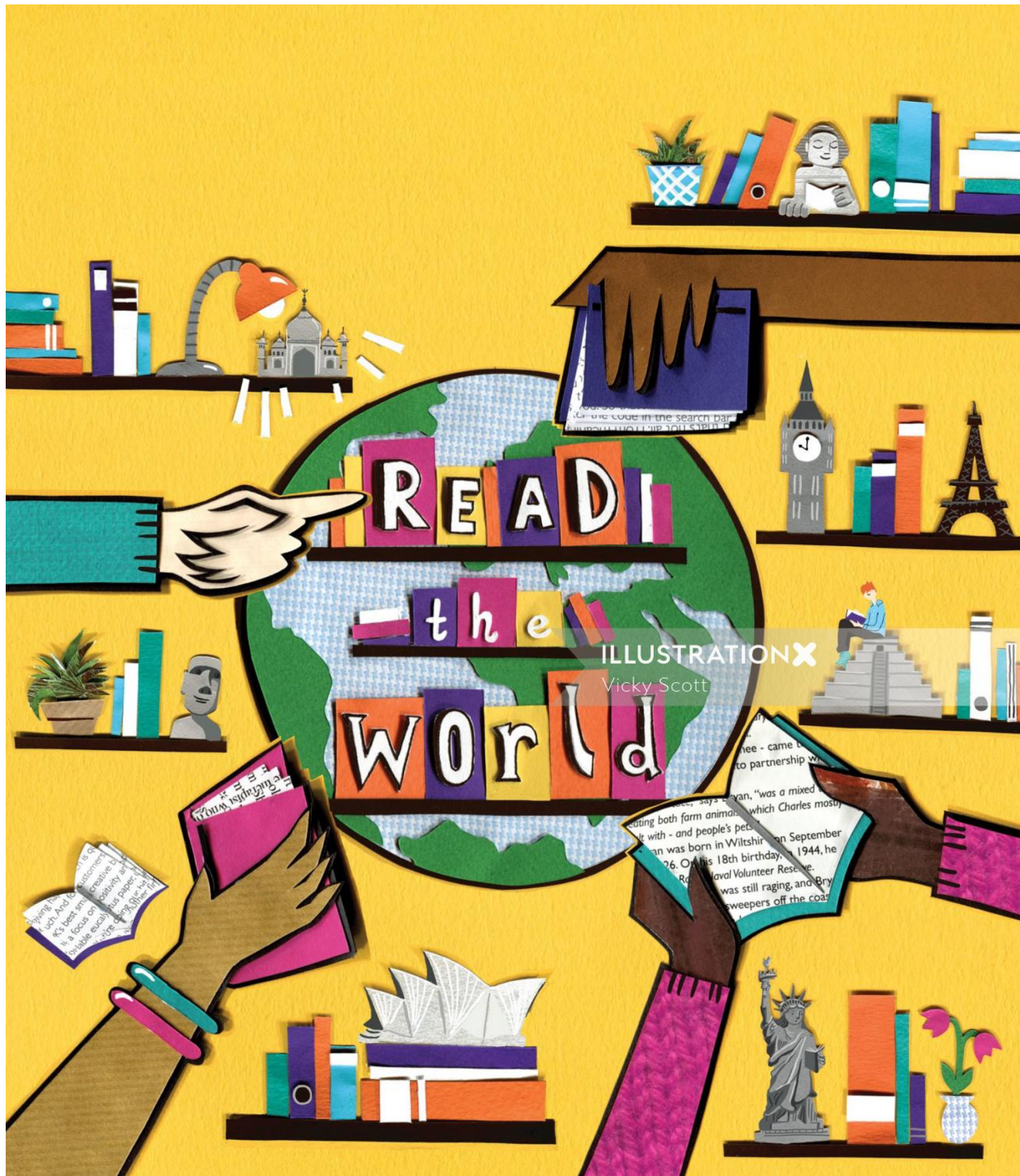
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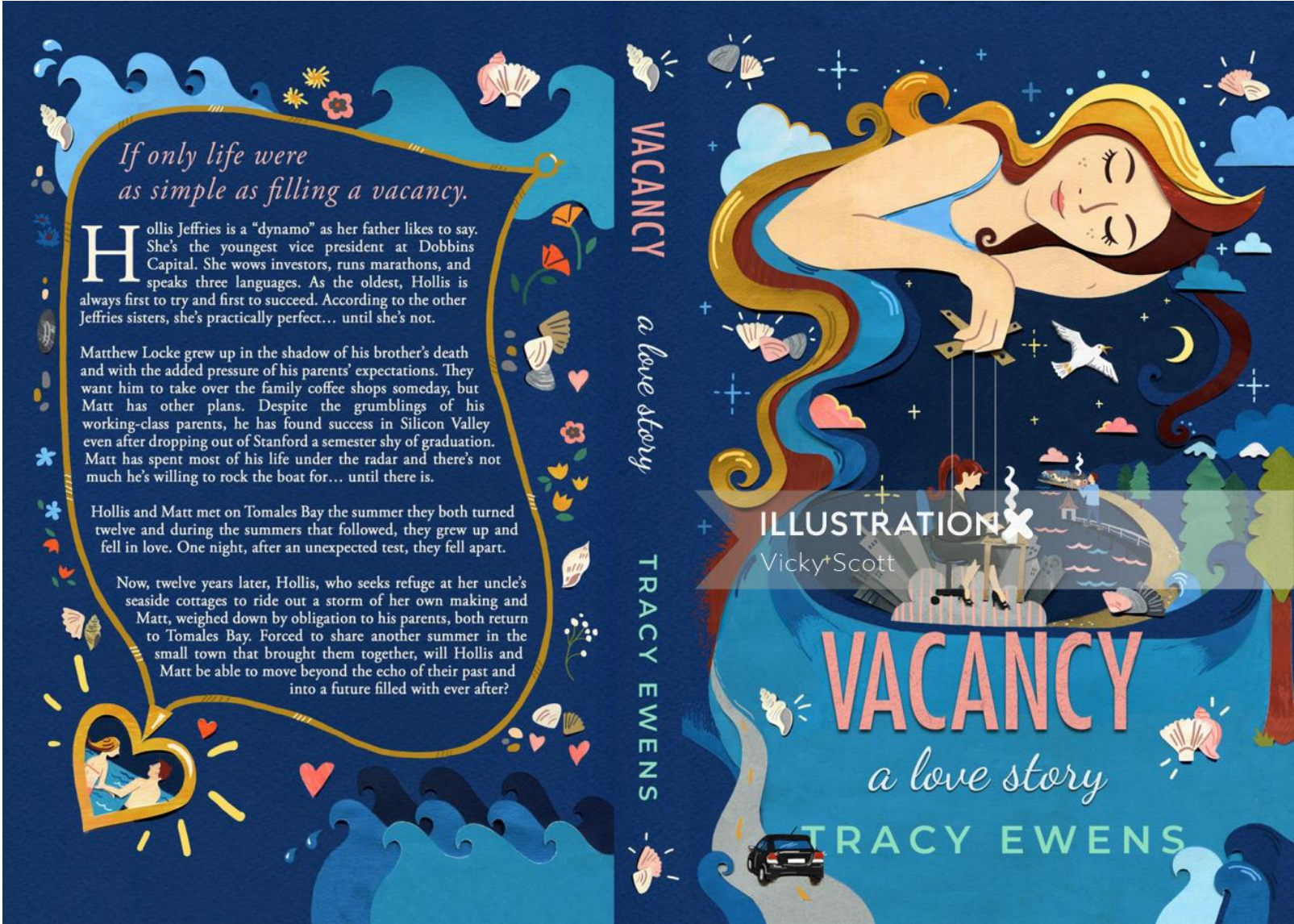
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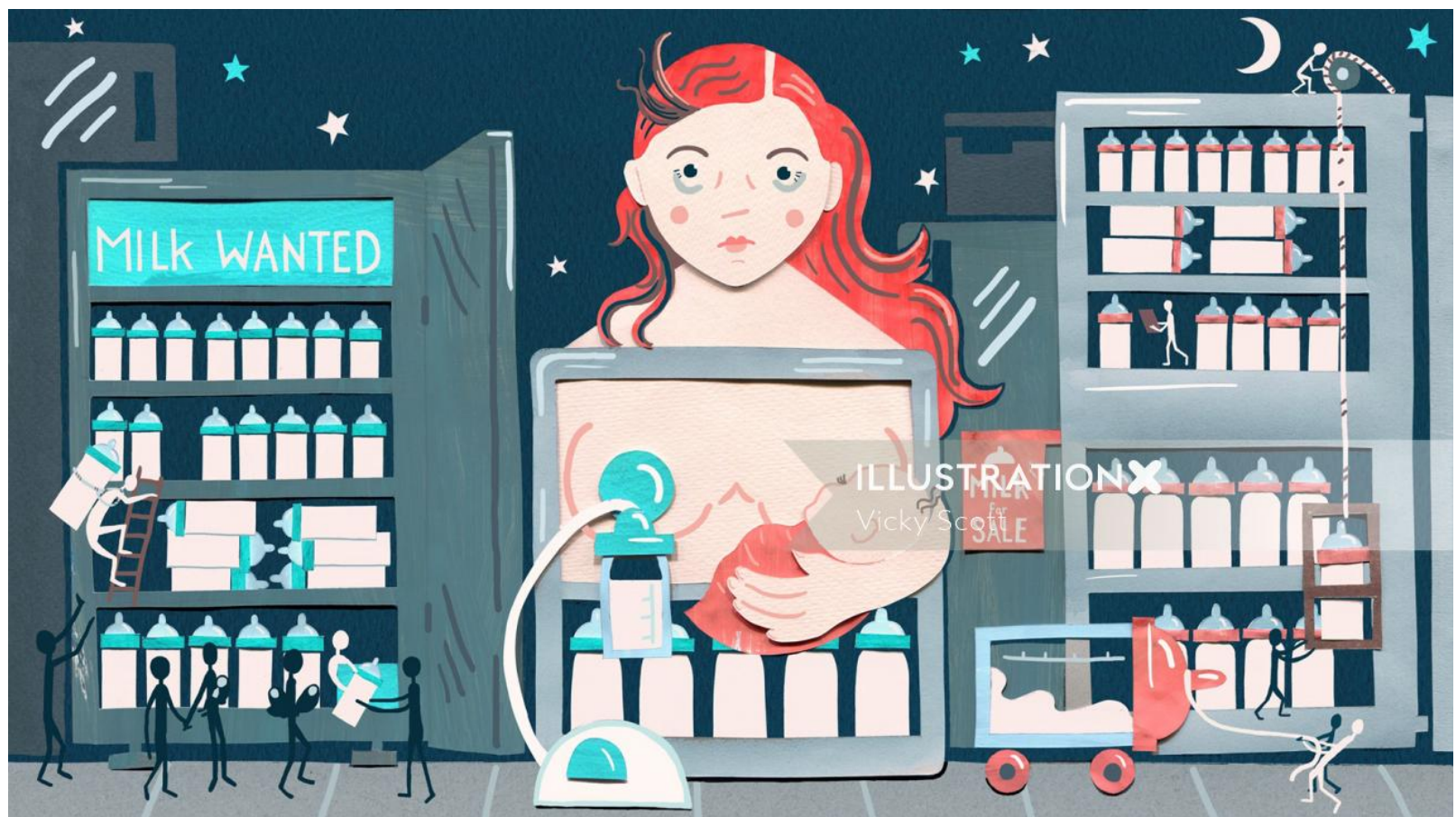
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