

Chester Raccoon stood at the edge of the forest and cried.

"I don't want to go to school," he told his mother. "I want to stay home with you. I want to play with my friends. And play with my toys. And read my books. And swing on my swing. Please may I stay home with you?"



Mrs. Raccoon took Chester by the hand and nuzzled him on the ear.

"Sometimes we all have to do things we don't want to do," she told him gently. "Even if they seem strange and scary at first. But you will love school once you start."





"You'll make new friends. And play with new toys."



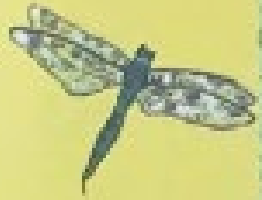
"Read new books. And swing on new swings. Besides," she added. "I know a wonderful secret that will make your nights at school seem as warm and cozy as your days at home."



Chester wiped away his tears and looked interested. "A secret? What kind of secret?"

"A very old secret," said Mrs. Raccoon. "I learned it from my mother, and she learned it from hers. It's called the Kissing Hand."

"The Kissing Hand?" asked Chester. "What's that?"

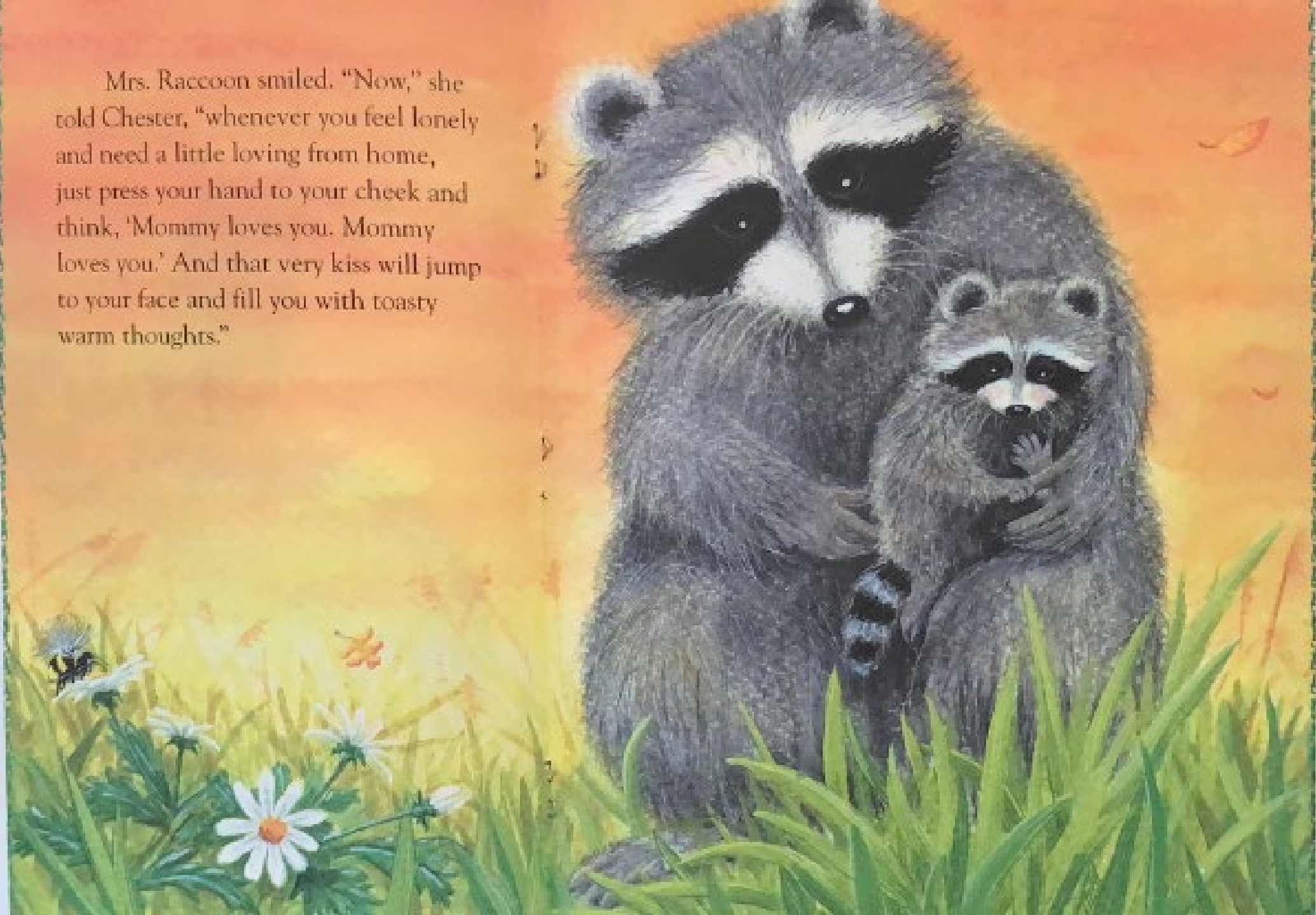


"I'll show you." Mrs. Raccoon took Chester's left hand and spread open his tiny fingers into a fan. Leaning forward, she kissed Chester right in the middle of his palm.

Chester felt his mother's kiss rush from his hand, up his arm, and into his heart. Even his silky, black mask tingled with a special warmth.



Mrs. Raccoon smiled. "Now," she told Chester, "whenever you feel lonely and need a little loving from home, just press your hand to your cheek and think, 'Mommy loves you. Mommy loves you.' And that very kiss will jump to your face and fill you with toasty warm thoughts."





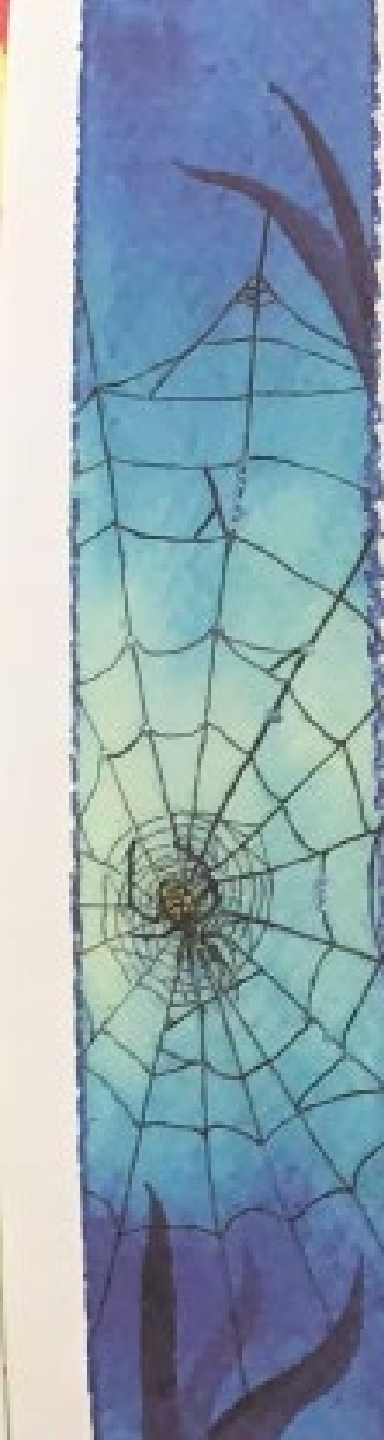
She took Chester's hand and carefully wrapped his fingers around the kiss. "Now, do be careful not to lose it," she teased him. "But, don't worry. When you open your hand and wash your food, I promise the kiss will stick."





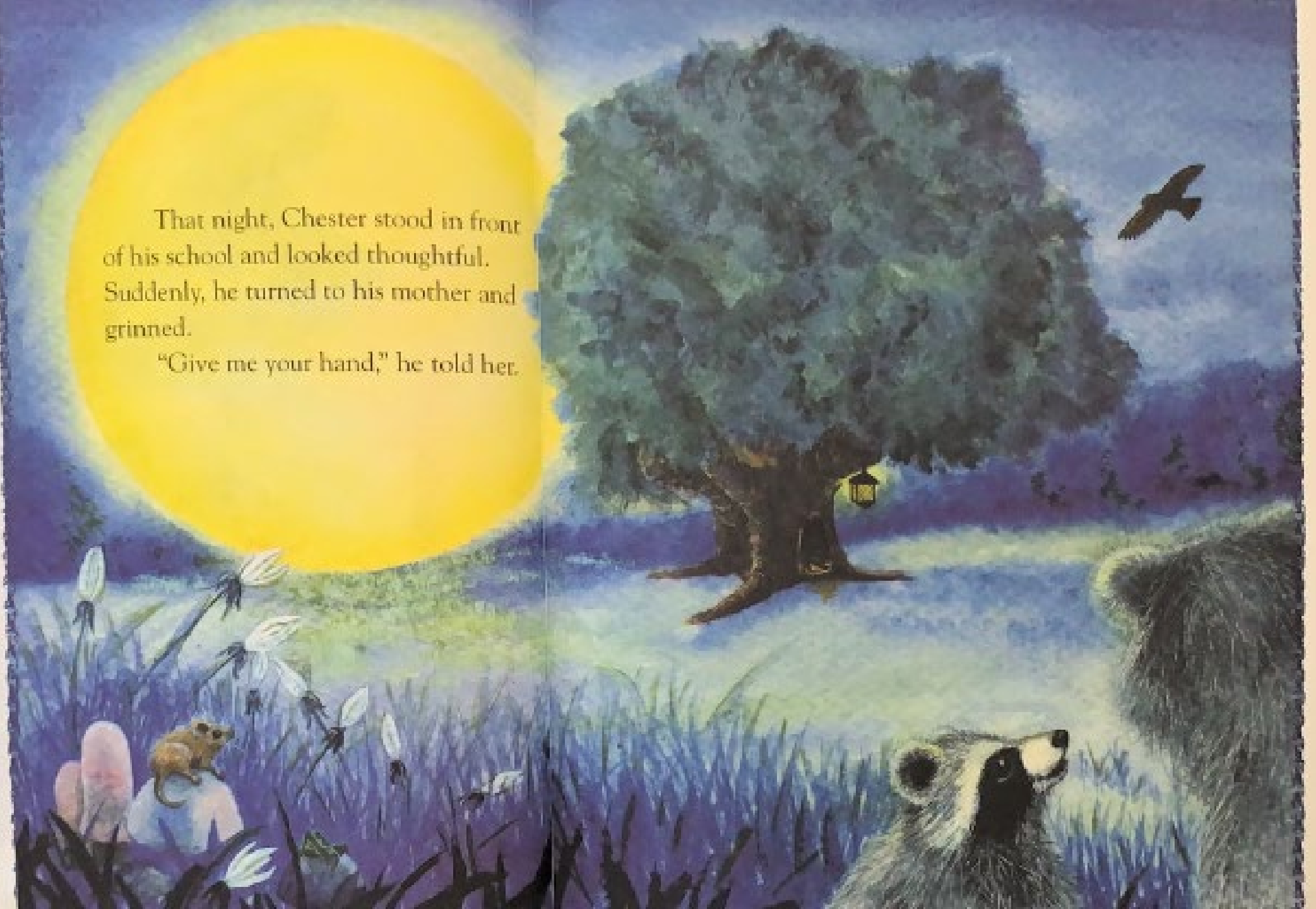
Chester loved his Kissing Hand. Now he knew his mother's love would go with him wherever he went. Even to school.





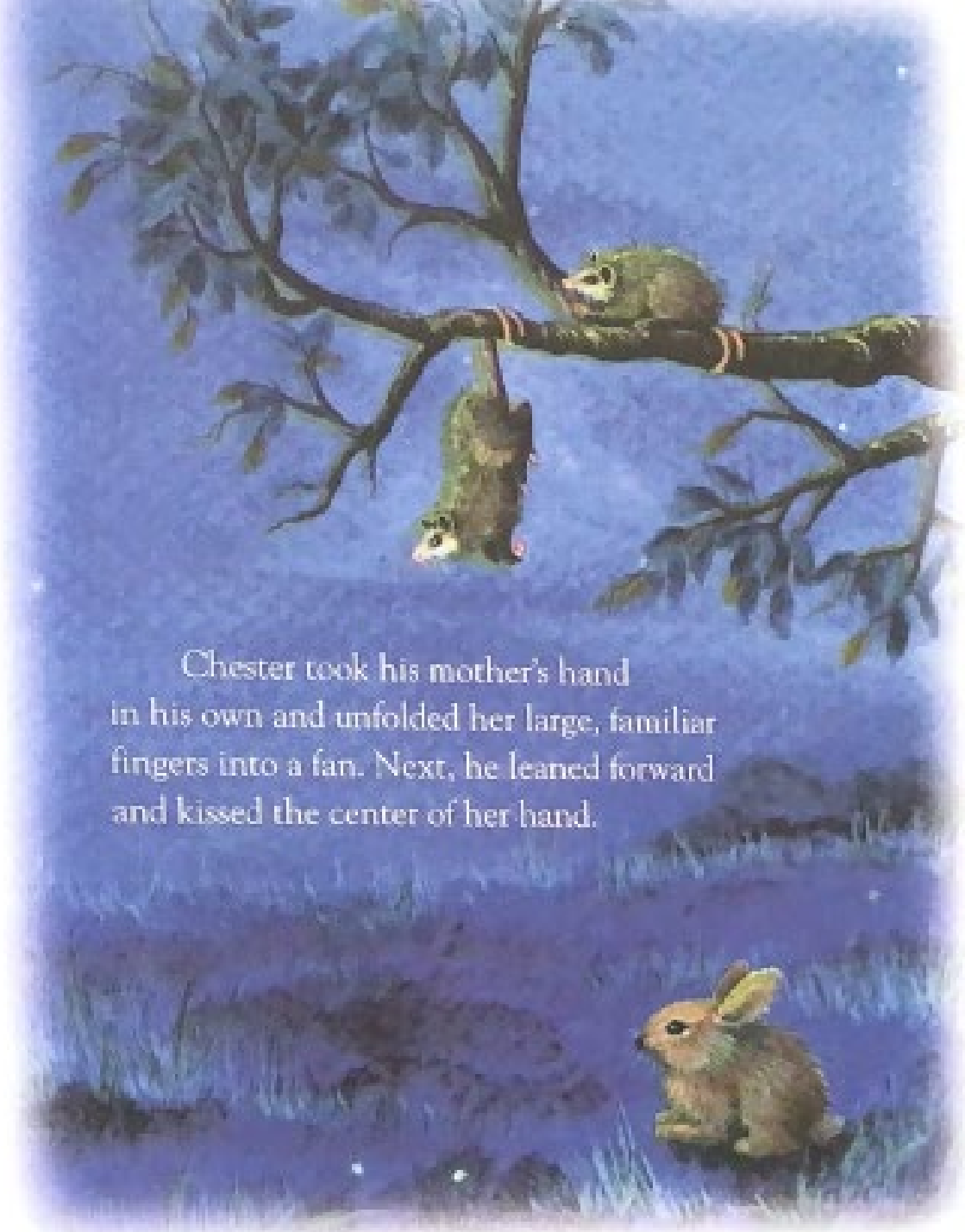
That night, Chester stood in front
of his school and looked thoughtful.
Suddenly, he turned to his mother and
grinned.

"Give me your hand," he told her.

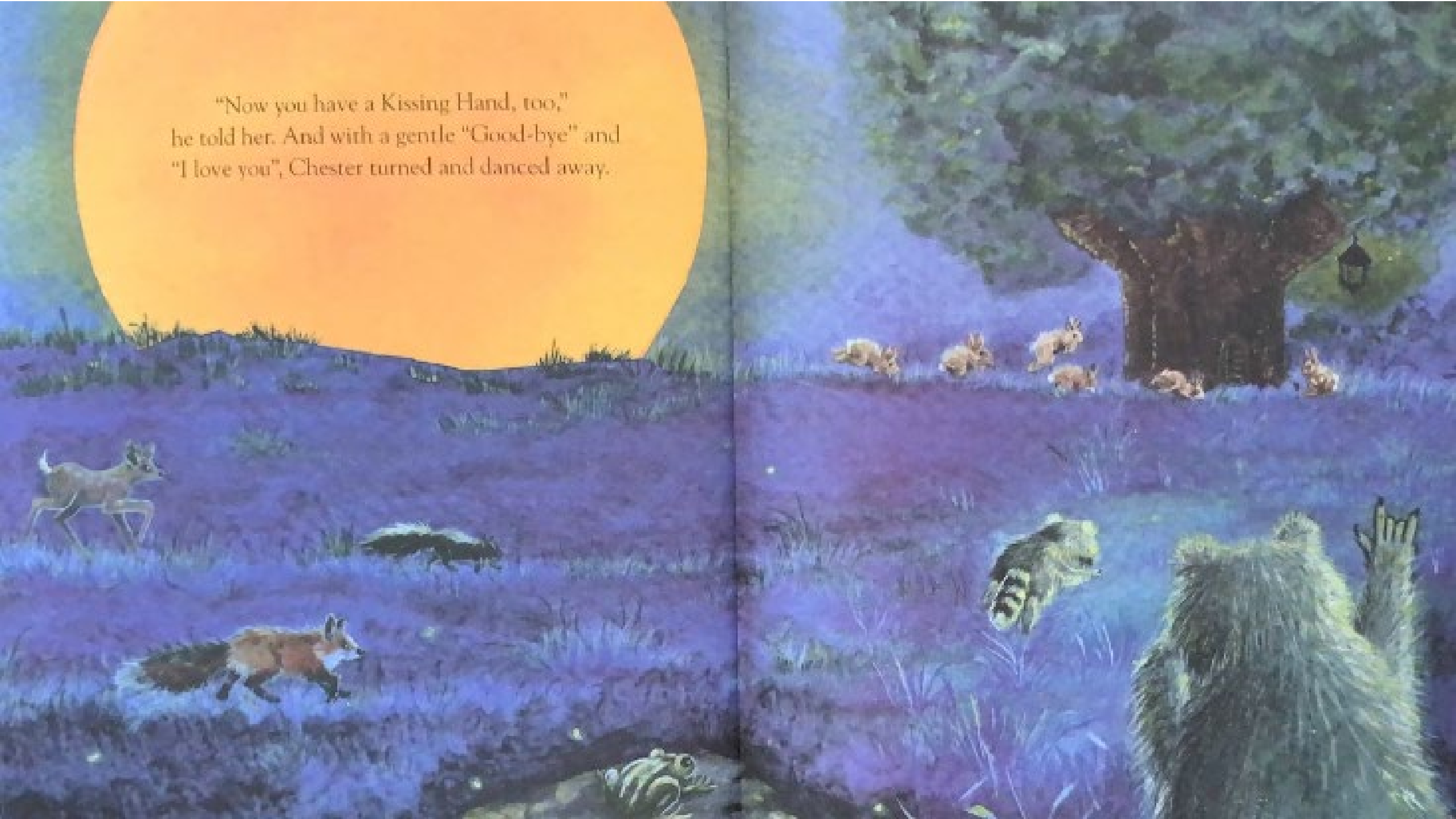




Chester took his mother's hand
in his own and unfolded her large, familiar
fingers into a fan. Next, he leaned forward
and kissed the center of her hand.



"Now you have a Kissing Hand, too,"
he told her. And with a gentle "Good-bye" and
"I love you", Chester turned and danced away.





Mrs. Raccoon watched Chester scamper across a tree limb and enter school. And as the hoot owl rang in the new school year, she pressed her left hand to her cheek and smiled.

The warmth of Chester's kiss filled her heart with special words.

"Chester loves you," it sang. "Chester loves you."







I LOVE YOU