

A Catio for Boris



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Illustrations by Andrea Da Rold

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Chapter 1

Susy Nesbit's neighbourhood had two problems. The first was a big brown cat called Boris. Boris wasn't a bad cat. He was just a friendly cat who liked to do what all cats like to do.

Boris didn't understand anything about private property, cat fur allergies, other creatures or road safety. Boris treated the neighbourhood as his personal amusement park. That often got him in trouble with the neighbours or put himself at risk.



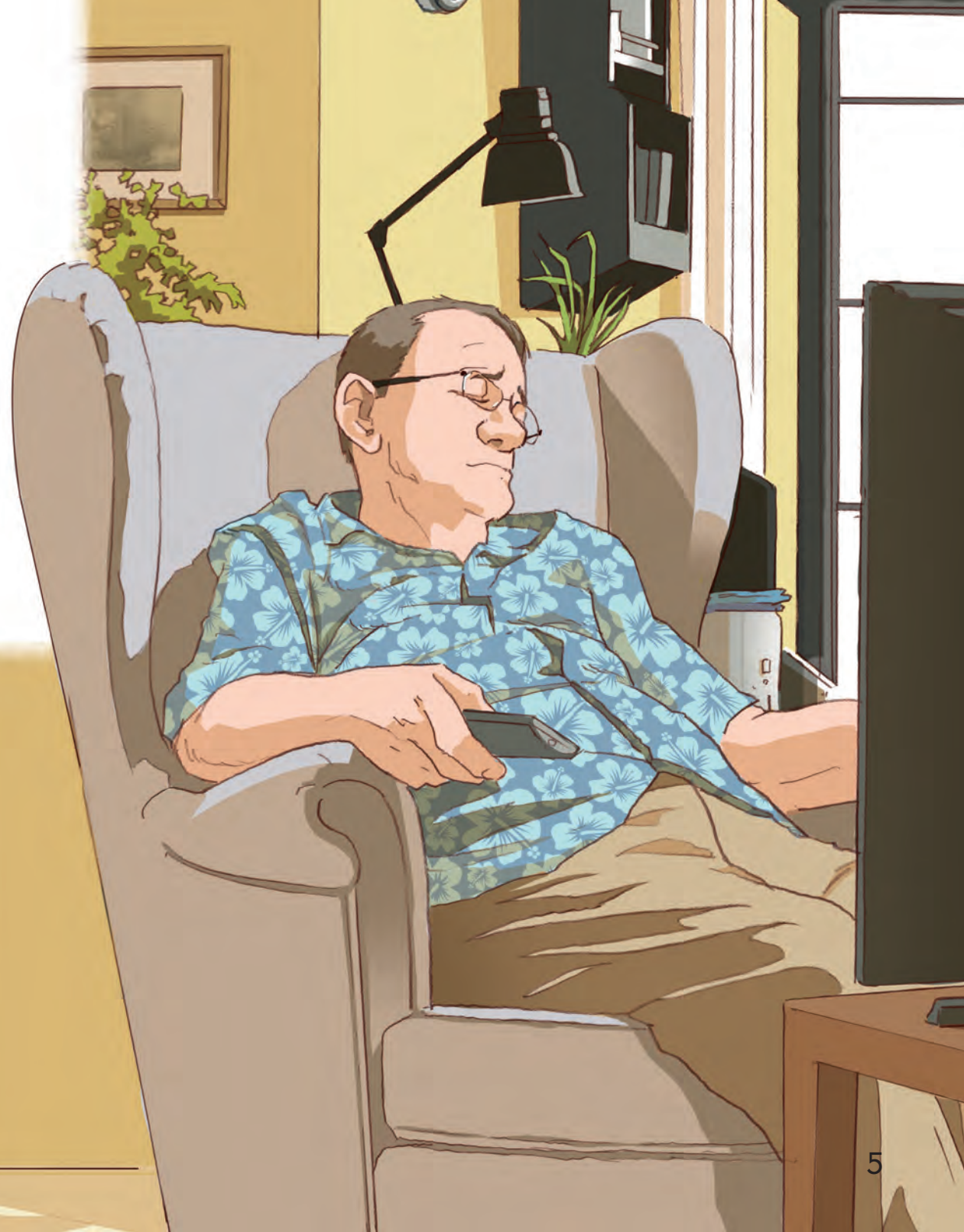
To Boris, fences, gates, doors, windows and roads were just obstacles to be jumped over, wriggled through, or run across without looking.

Chairs and tables were scratching posts. Rugs and cushions were hiding places. Toilet rolls were papery pathways. The McGintys' herb garden and Matty Mason's sandpit were litter boxes. Sometimes, the birds in Patty Mitchell's kōwhai tree and the goldfish in Tama Parata's pond were lunch.



The second problem was Mr Midgen. He didn't growl at kids for skateboarding past his house, or keep their balls when they landed in his garden. He was a kind old man who everyone liked. The problem was he refused to believe that his cat Boris was anything other than perfect.

Mr Midgen believed that Boris spent all day lying in the sun, pottering around the garden and sleeping. He didn't know that when he was snoozing in his armchair or visiting the library, Boris was somewhere else. And he was often causing trouble.



Chapter 2

Susy Nesbit worked from home. Her office window gave her a good view of the neighbourhood. She had a much better idea than Mr Midgen of what Boris got up to every day.

Despite his reputation for mischief, Susy liked Boris. On most days, she was happy to see him squeeze through her open window and greet her with a “Meow!”



But today was different! Susy was in the middle of an important online meeting. Boris jumped through the window and landed with a thump on her desk. His furry body filled the computer screen.

In a panic, Susy grabbed at Boris, knocking her coffee cup over her lap. She leapt up, revealing her teddy bear pyjamas below her business jacket.

Boris made his escape out the window and down the tree. Susy scrambled to press the “stop video” button on her screen. That was when she heard the sound of screeching brakes.

Dashing outside, she saw that an orange courier van had stopped in the middle of the road. Black tyre marks showed that it had stopped quickly.

“That was close,” she heard the driver say to a passing walker. “That cat ran right out in front of me.”

In the distance Susy could see Boris sauntering down the footpath. She wasn’t surprised when he jumped the McGintys’ fence on his way to their herb garden. Susy realised that something had to be done about Boris. This was for his own sake and the sake of the neighbourhood.

And she was going to do it.



Chapter 3

Susy organised a face-to-face meeting in her house. All the neighbours were there except for Mr Midgen. The windows were closed so that Boris couldn't attend uninvited. It was Boris they were going to talk about.

"I've been doing some research," Susy said. "I think the answer to our Boris problem is a catio." A picture of a structure connected to the side of a house appeared on Susy's TV screen.

"It's a patio for cats," she said as she held up more pictures. "It is an enclosed outdoor space. Cats can explore and exercise while staying safe and not causing problems for neighbours or other animals."

"Looks purrrrfect to me," said Tama Parata with a smile. "But George Midgen won't be able to afford one of these."



“No problem!” said Susy. “I’ve looked into it. We can build it for him. I’ll design it and we all know how to use a hammer and nails. I’ve got a pile of recycled timber in my shed. I’ve already spoken to Mr Benson from the hardware shop. Boris has dug up his pumpkin patch so many times so he will give us bits and pieces for free.”

“That’s good,” said Patty Mitchell, “but how are we going to convince Mr Midgen that Boris needs a catio?”

“Leave that to me,” said Gurinder Singh. “I’ll talk to him tomorrow.”



Chapter 4

When Mr Midgen answered the door and saw Gurinder, he looked hopeful.

“Have you found Boris?” he asked excitedly.

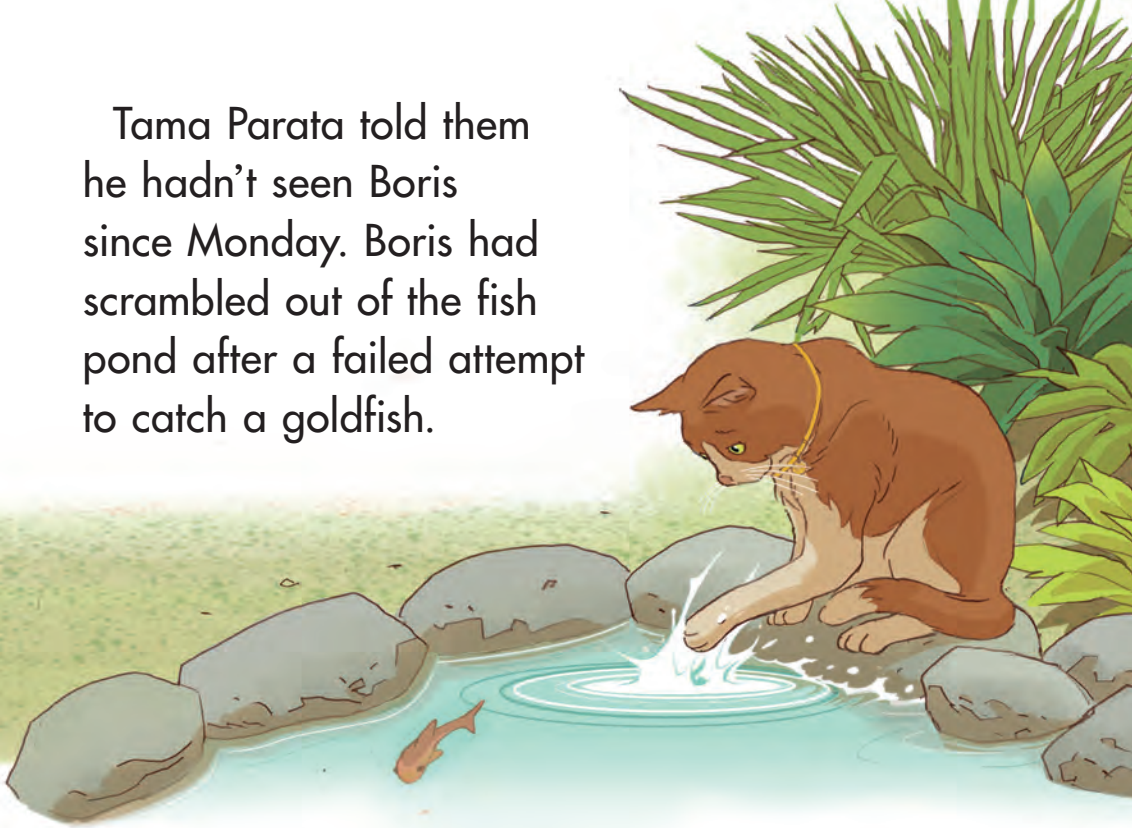
But Gurinder told him she didn’t have his cat and she didn’t know Boris was missing. She offered to walk around the neighbourhood to see if anyone had seen Boris.

“Thanks, I just can’t think where he can be,” said Mr Midgen. “He never leaves my property.”

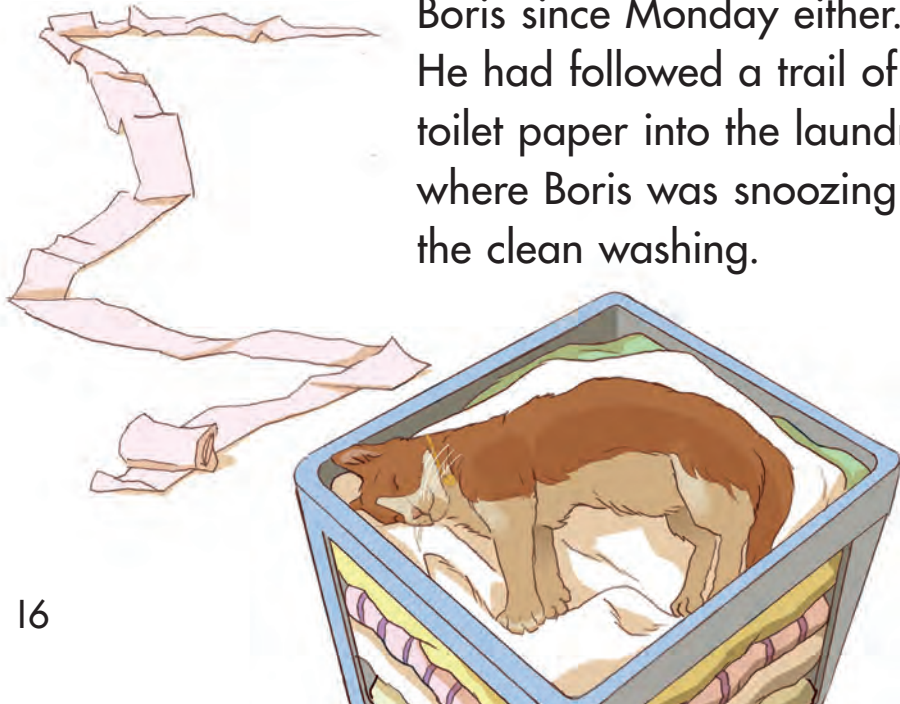
But by the time they returned from their walk, Mr Midgen had changed his mind.



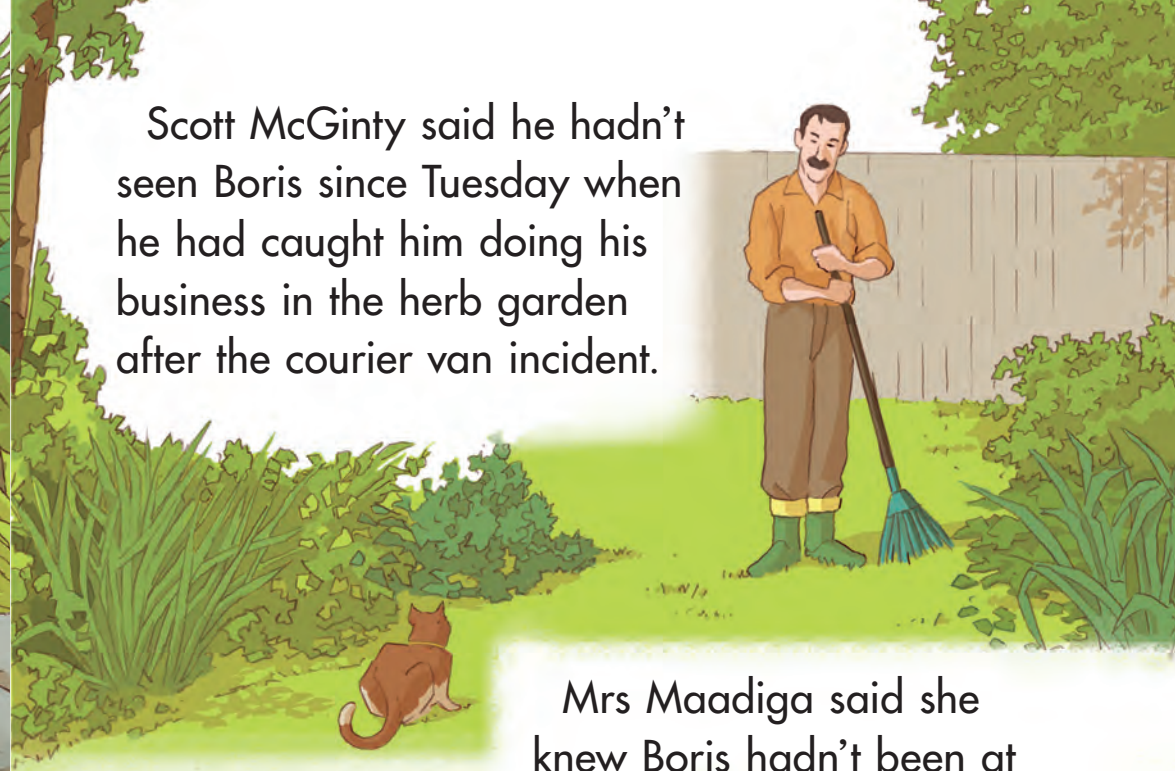
Tama Parata told them he hadn't seen Boris since Monday. Boris had scrambled out of the fish pond after a failed attempt to catch a goldfish.



Tom Mitchell hadn't seen Boris since Monday either. He had followed a trail of toilet paper into the laundry where Boris was snoozing on the clean washing.



Scott McGinty said he hadn't seen Boris since Tuesday when he had caught him doing his business in the herb garden after the courier van incident.



Mrs Maadiga said she knew Boris hadn't been at her house for days because the rash from her fur allergy had cleared up.



Sam Tiatia hadn't seen Boris. He had heard his familiar "Yowwwl!" during a cat fight the night before.



Mr Midgen was horrified that Boris had been living a secret life. Now, he was even more worried about what might have happened to him.

A phone call from his local SPCA lifted the worry from Mr Midgen's shoulders. Boris had been found, hungry but unhurt, stuck in a karaka tree. He had been stalking a kererū. Because Boris was microchipped and registered, the staff at SPCA could scan his microchip and find out his name, his age and his guardian's contact details.

The neighbours were happy that he was safe. Some dropped in to see Boris when he came home. They shared scones and told Mr Midgen about the catio they would like to build for Boris. Mr Midgen was delighted. He just wanted Boris to be safe. Everyone had lots of different ideas to make the catio fun for Boris.

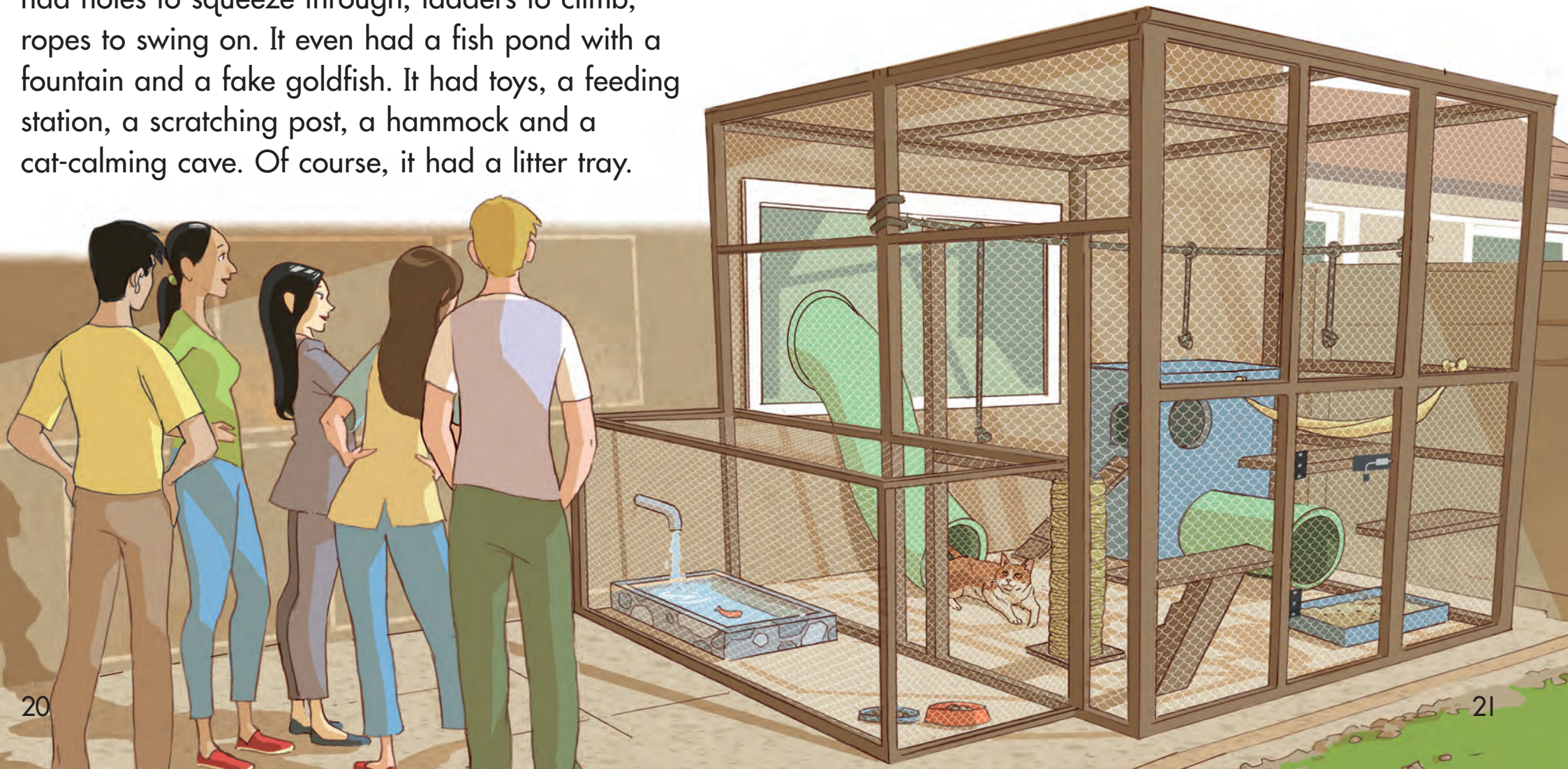
Susy Nesbit, who normally designed houses for people, did her best to include all the ideas.



Chapter 5

When it was finished, the catio had everything an adventurous cat could want. It had hiding places, outdoor space and access to the house. It had multi-level rest areas with coloured, textured surfaces connected by tunnels and bridges. It had holes to squeeze through, ladders to climb, ropes to swing on. It even had a fish pond with a fountain and a fake goldfish. It had toys, a feeding station, a scratching post, a hammock and a cat-calming cave. Of course, it had a litter tray.

At the opening party, the neighbours were very excited about it. Not Boris! Like all cats, Boris tried not to seem excited in front of humans. He went and slept on Mr Midgen's bed until everyone went home. When Mr Midgen was snoozing in front of the TV, the fun started.



When Mr Midgen woke up, he followed a path of unrolled toilet paper to the cat door. When Boris saw Mr Midgen, he tried to look like he wasn't enjoying himself at all. But each day Boris spent more time in his new catio. Mr Midgen spent more time with Boris now. They played together, napped together and curled up in front of the TV together.

"I'm going to make sure Boris stays in the house or the catio all the time!" Mr Midgen shouted across the road to Susy. "He couldn't be happier!" Susy laughed. "I couldn't be happier to hear that!" she said "I've got another important online meeting this morning. I don't want anyone to see my pyjamas again!"



Keeping Your Cat Happy at Home: Facts and Tips

- Cats who stay at home are more likely to live longer and enjoy healthier lives. This means more quality time spent with you and your whānau.
- Cats need to perform their natural behaviours. It's important that the spaces you provide your cat give them lots of opportunities to do things like climbing, scratching, hiding and exploring.
- Play is really important for cats and kittens as it allows them to express their natural hunting behaviours like stalking and pouncing. Playing with your cat will also teach you about your cat's personality and strengthen the bond and trust between you.
- Cats can become bored playing with the same toys so swap toys around to keep your cat interested. You can find instructions for making cat toys on SPCA's Kids' Portal.
- Catios are a great way to keep your cat safe and happy at home. Catios can include: resting and hiding places; food; fresh drinking water; toileting areas (litter trays); toys; places to scratch.
- An alternative to a catio is to secure your yard with an escape proof fence. Your cat(s) can still have access to your yard, but they will remain safe on your property.
- Even if your cat stays at home, they need to be microchipped, spayed or neutered, and vaccinated. These are all important actions that responsible animal guardians should take.
- Always consult a veterinarian immediately if your cat is sick, injured, or not acting like themselves.

Visit [spca.nz/kids](https://www.spcanew Zealand.org.nz/kids) to learn more about SPCA and caring for cats

Sapphire

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