

LINH AND THE RED ENVELOPE

BY DIANE TRAN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALEX PATRICK SHIMKUS



About the Reading Together Project:

The Reading Together Project seeks to address the lack of children's books that speak to the experience of being an Asian Pacific Islander (API) child or youth in the United States. The project supports the development of English literacy skills while recognizing cultural heritage, and creating opportunities for children and families to learn about API cultural heritage together.

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Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans and
Minnesota Humanities Center
Saint Paul, Minnesota

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Book design: Kim Jackson, Dalros Design
Copy editor: Sally Heuer
Printed by: Grace Wong with Team One Printing
Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-0-9884539-4-4

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
First Edition



Dedications:

For every kid trying to do the right thing.
Know that you already are the right thing.

DIANE TRAN

I would like to dedicate this book to Alie,
my family, and my friends,
who have been a great support.

ALEX PATRICK SHIMKUS

How to pronounce the Vietnamese words in this story:

Chúc Mừng Năm Mới (chook mung num moy)

áo dài (ow yai)

Cảm ƠN (gahm ung)

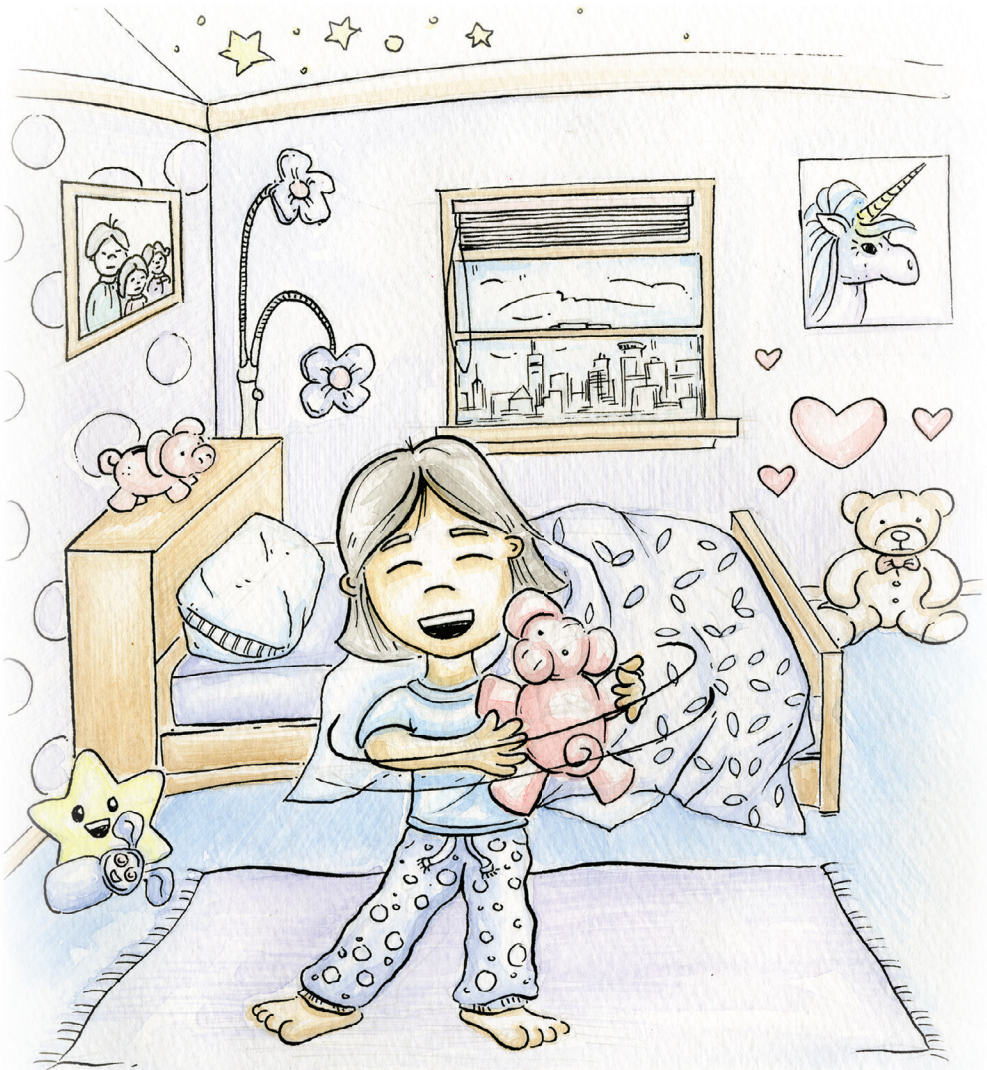
Today is a special day. Linh jumps out of bed.

“Happy New Year, Pinky!”

She twirls Pinky the stuffed pig around in a circle.

“We are going to have so much fun celebrating with my cousins and eating our favorite Vietnamese foods today.

I can’t wait!”



“Mommy says we must finish getting the house ready so that we can have good luck this year. If we are good, we will get a red envelope with lucky money!”



Linh reaches into her closet for her traditional Vietnamese áo dài dress.

“First, we must dress up in our best celebration clothes.”

Linh puts a Vietnamese hat on Pinky.

“Now, let’s go downstairs to help Mommy.”

On her way out of the room,
Linh’s áo dài gets caught on the door handle.

It tears a small hole in the beautiful fabric.

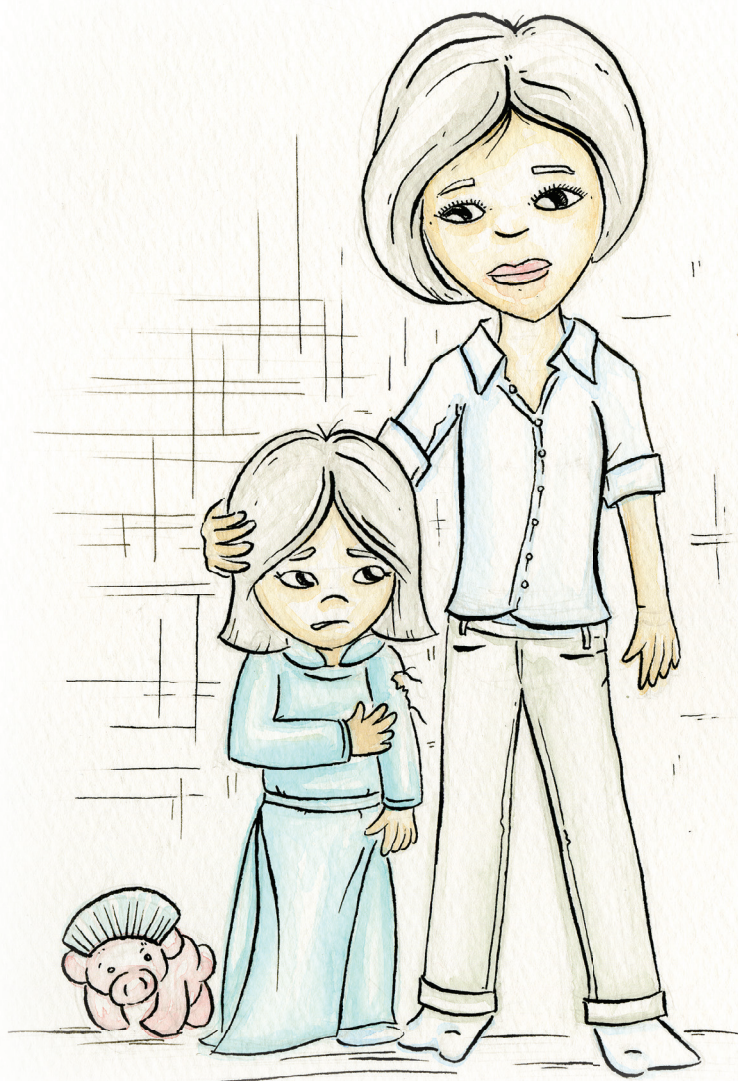
“Aiya!” she cries.



Linh's mom comes to see what the fuss is about.
"Linh, you must be more careful with your áo dài."

"Sorry, Mommy."

Her mom gently pats her arm and says, "I will sew it back together before the new year celebration dinner, Linh."



“Now, can you remember how to wish someone a
Happy New Year in Vietnamese?”

“Chúc Mann Nam Mới!”

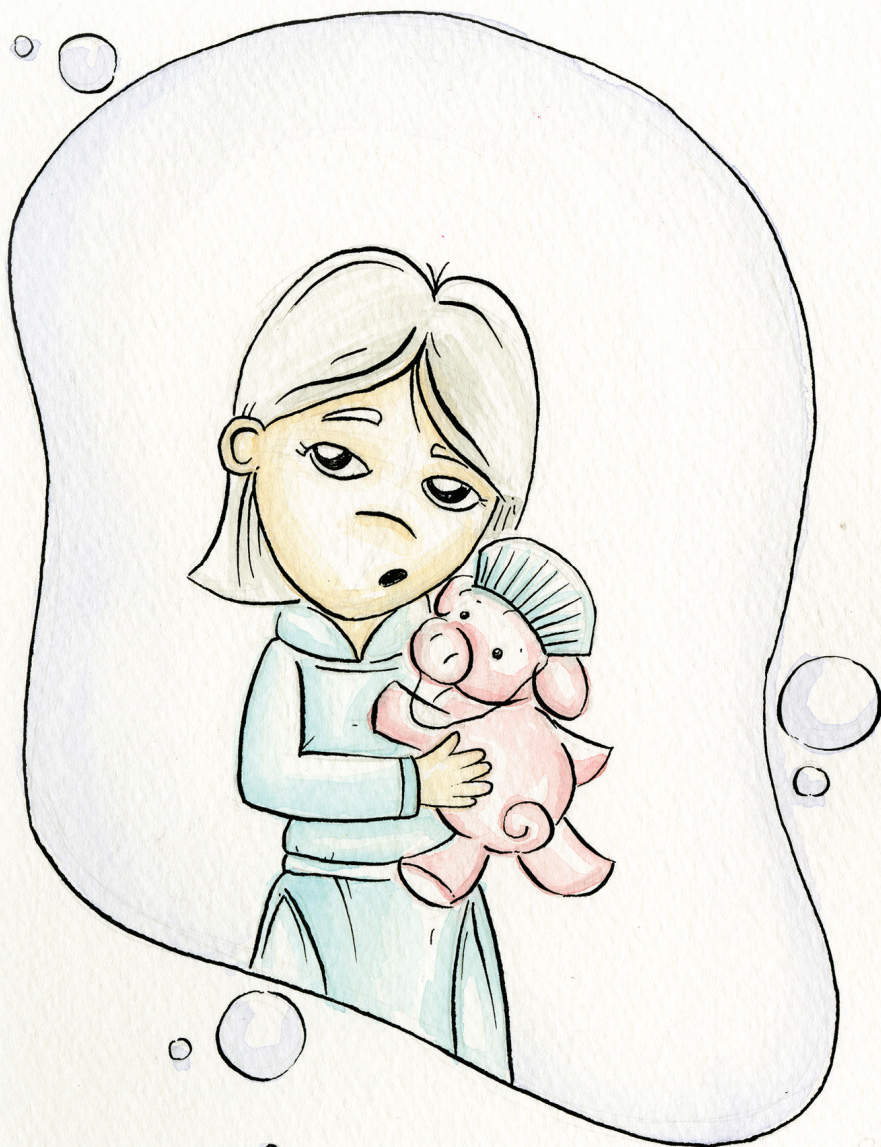
“Very close,” Linh’s mom says, smiling.
“Chúc Mừng Năm Mới!”

Linh frowns. “Aiya!
Sorry, Mommy. I can’t do it right.”

“You must continue to practice, Linh.
Now, let’s go downstairs and clean the house
so that we can clear out the bad spirits
and make room for good luck.”

“Okay, Mommy!”

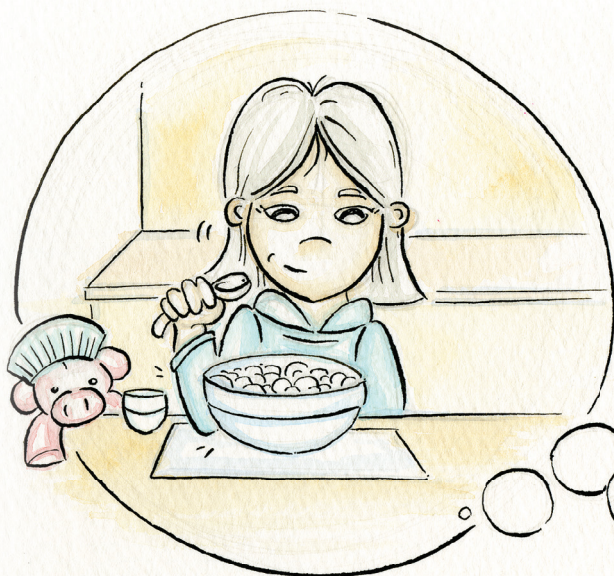






Linh picks up Pinky and whispers in his ear,
“That was close. I already did two things wrong today.
I know I can do better.
Then our house will have good luck this lunar new year
and I can get a red envelope.”

Linh's mom has a beautiful breakfast on the table.
"Linh, you must eat your whole bowl of sweet tapioca pearls. It will give you good luck this year."



Linh excitedly
begins to slurp up
her bowl of sweet
tapioca pearls.
But she eats
too fast!

Her bowl spills
onto the table.
"Aiya!"
Linh cries out.





Linh's mom shakes her head and rushes over with a towel to wipe up the mess. "Linh, you must eat more carefully."

"Here," her mother tells her, "have some jasmine tea."

Linh takes the cup, preparing to sip her tea slowly.

“Linh!” her mother scolds her. “I have taught you many times that you must offer tea to your elders before you drink it yourself. Now, set your cup down and offer some tea to your grandma in her room.”



Linh tucks Pinky under her arm and carefully brings a cup of hot tea down the hallway.



“Grandmother,” she says quietly, to make sure her grandma is awake, “do you want some tea?”
Linh’s grandma smiles at her from her reading chair.

“Cảm ƠN. Thank you very much, Linh.”

“Chúc Mừng Năm Meh, Grandmother,” Linh says softly.

“Very close, Linh. Chúc Mừng Năm Mới.
And Happy New Year to you, too.” Her grandmother winks.
“Do you want to help me clean a little to make more space
for good luck?”







Linh smiles, grabbing the small broom her grandmother hands her. She sweeps around the TV and bedposts, being especially careful around the nightstand with a picture of Grandpa, who has gone to be with the ancestors.

Linh sweeps near her grandma's pile of books, which are stacked high.

She has all but finished when her broomstick catches the corner of a book, which gets pulled to the ground.

“Aiya!”

Her grandma looks down from where she is dusting high shelves. “Linh! You know it is very important that the Buddhist Prayer Book does not touch the floor. You must be careful.”

Linh turns red. “I’m sorry, Grandmother.”

“Do not worry, Linh. Why don’t you go pray to the ancestors to help you be more careful?” she kindly offers.



“Yes, Grandmother.” Linh brings Pinky to the front door and they kneel in front of the shrine. Linh bows three times, putting her palms flat and touching her forehead to the floor.



She smiles at Pinky as she gets up.
“I did it just right, like my mommy taught me!”

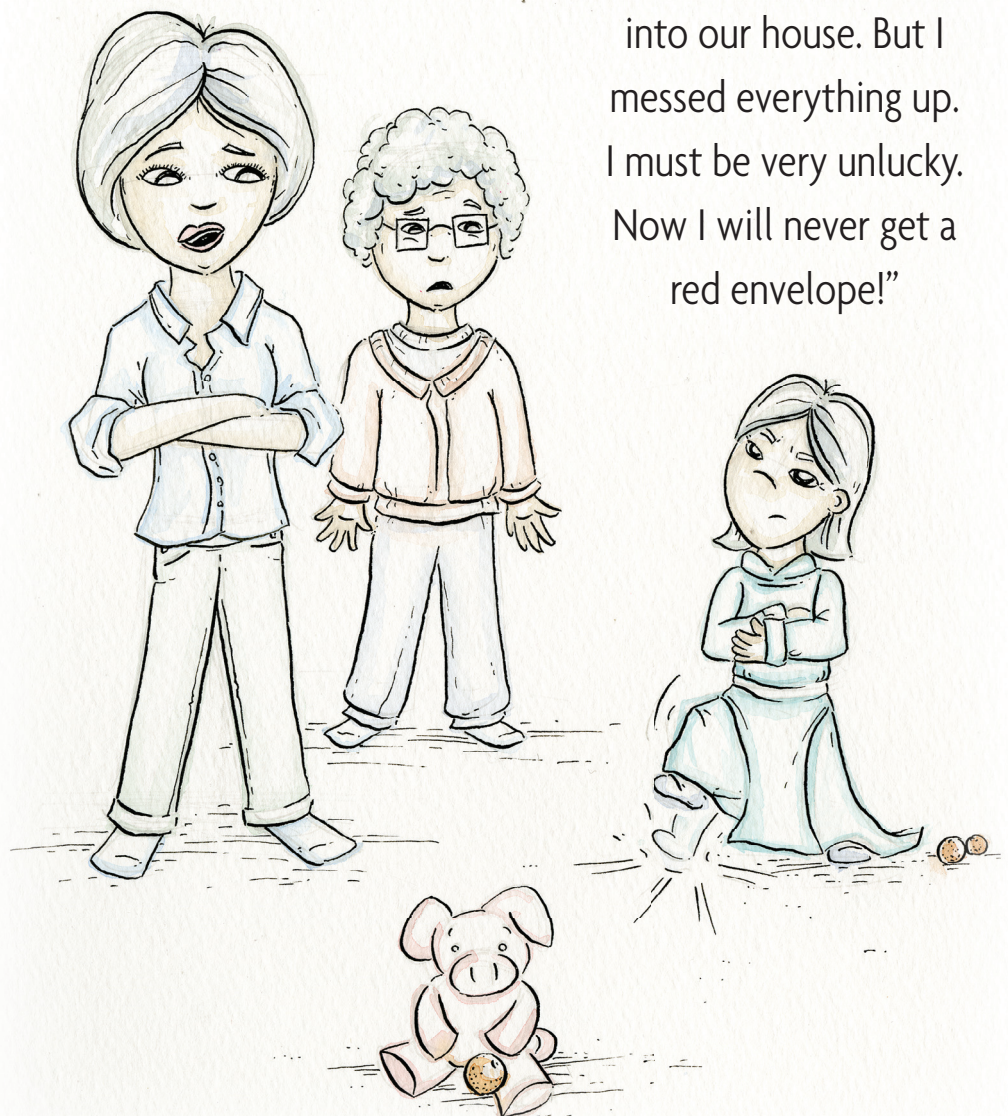
Linh jumps up to walk away,
but Pinky's tail knocks over the pile of lucky oranges,
and they go tumbling all around on the floor!

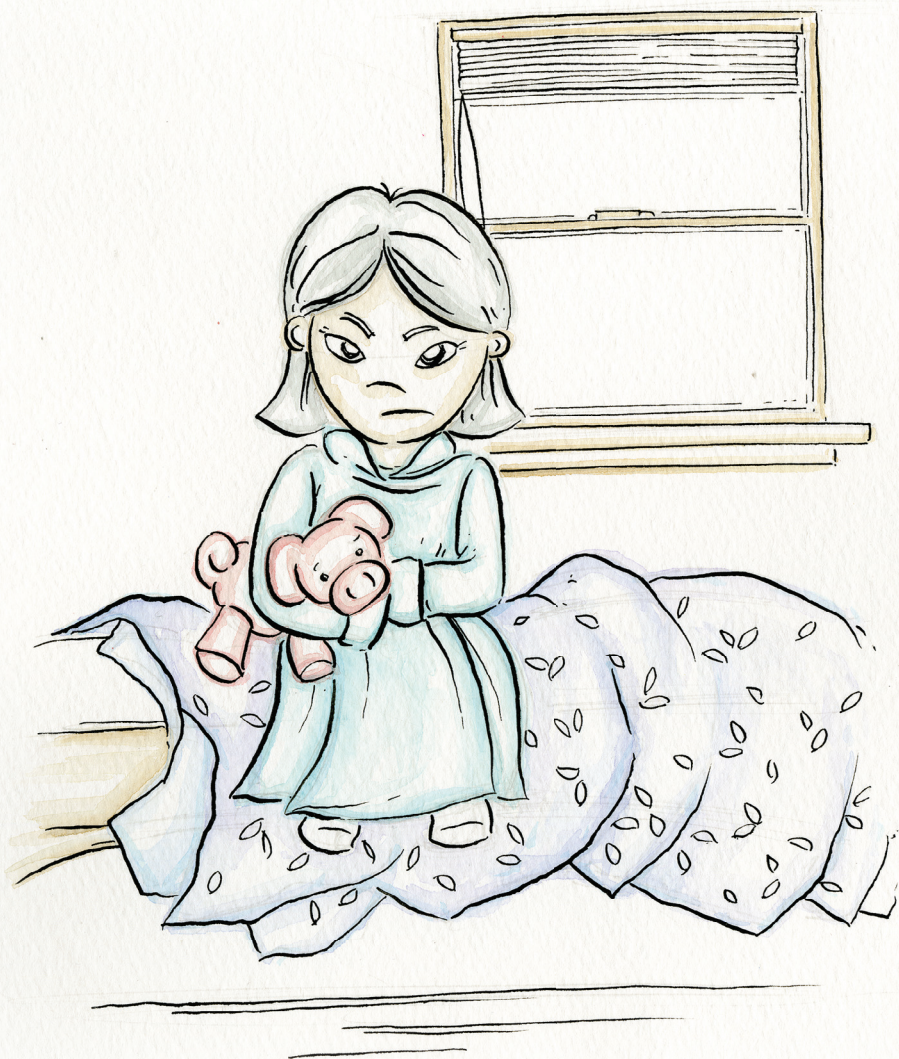
“Aiya!”



Linh's mom and grandma come running to see what has happened. Linh crosses her arms and stomps her foot.

“All I wanted to do today was help bring good luck into our house. But I messed everything up. I must be very unlucky. Now I will never get a red envelope!”





Frustrated, she goes up to her room
and sits on her bed, hugging Pinky tight.

“How did it all go so wrong, Pinky?
All I wanted was to do the right things and
make my mommy and grandmother happy.”



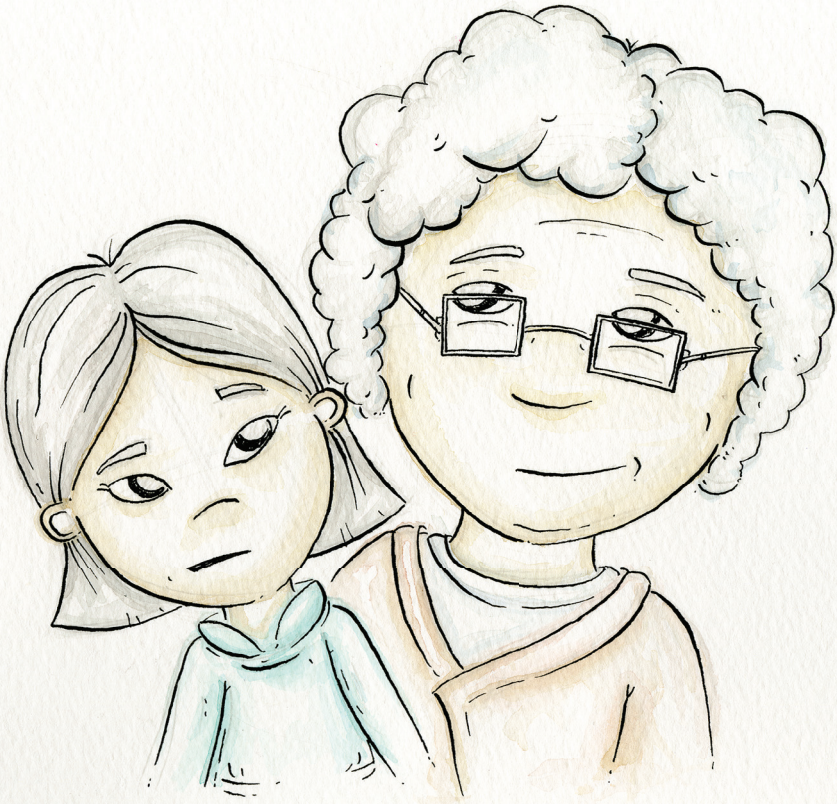
There is a soft knock at the door,
and Linh's mom and grandma walk into her bedroom.
Linh's mom reaches out her hand.

"Here is your red envelope, Linh.
It is for being such a good daughter."



Linh is confused.
“Why? Everything I did today went wrong—
putting on my áo dài,
trying to say ‘Happy New Year’ in Vietnamese,
eating my sweet tapioca pearls,
drinking tea,
cleaning the house,
and praying to the ancestors.
Nothing I did was right. I’m not a good daughter.”

Linh’s grandma sits down next to her on the bed.
“Linh, it takes many years to learn how
to do these things right.
For your mother, it took until she was much older
than you are now.
You will learn these things over time.”



Linh's grandma pulls her onto her lap.
"You are our precious fortune, Linh."

Linh's mom nods firmly, agreeing.
"What matters is not how *well* you do each thing, but that you *want* to do each thing. It shows that you have a wish to honor your elders, your ancestors, and your family. For that, you have more than earned your red envelope."

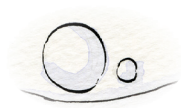
Her mother touches Linh's cheek.
“You bring us honor by respecting your family and culture.
You are still growing up, Linh, but you have already brought
us so much good luck.”

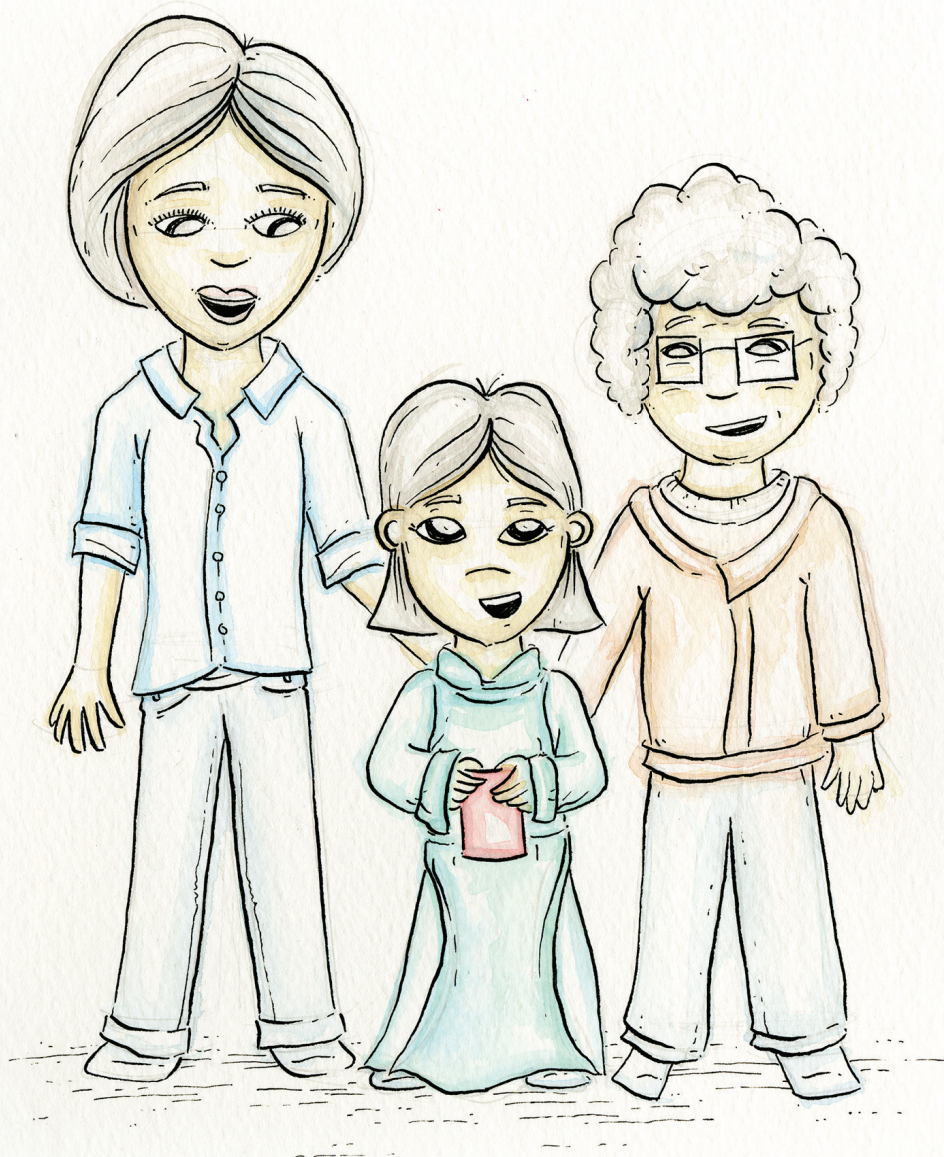


Linh smiles at the red envelope in her hand.

“Thank you, Mommy and Grandmother.

Chúc Mừng Năm Mới!”





DIANE'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS My deepest gratitude to my parents, Xia Kim Tran and Khen Ngoc Ma, for life lessons and red envelopes throughout the years; Cedric and Randy, for their kindness and big hearts; and Linh, this book's namesake and in whose guiding sisterly footsteps I have followed regularly in life. Much love to the Tran family for their boisterous encouragement and thoughtful input on the writing of this book. #wearethetrans

Thanks to Sara Renn, the best friend a girl could have, and to my incredible husband, Jeff Bauer, for their unconditional love and support. Special thanks to the Minnesota Humanities Center, the Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans, and Alex Shimkus for their partnership in telling this story.

DIANE TRAN manages electoral and advocacy projects at Grassroots Solutions, a national consulting firm specializing in grassroots strategy, organizing, training, and evaluation. Ms. Tran serves as treasurer for the Citizens League, is a member of the Minnesota Humanities Center Absent Narratives Collaborative, and was a 2006–2007 Policy Fellow at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. Diane earned academic honors while completing a self-designed bachelor's degree in international social policy with a double major in humanities at The College of St. Scholastica. Ms. Tran was named one of Ten Outstanding Young Minnesotans in 2008 by the Minnesota Junior Chamber, and leads a network of emerging leaders committed to building relationships, trust, and a shared vision for Minnesota at www.MinnesotaRising.org.

ALEX'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS I would like to thank everyone who was involved in the Reading Together Project.

ALEX PATRICK SHIMKUS was born in Seoul, Korea, was raised in Bloomington, Minnesota, and is a children's book illustrator and a cartoonist. Alex has previously published an educational book titled *Teaching Tips for Kids with Asperger's*. He studied fine art at Normandale Community College and earned his BFA in illustration at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. When Alex is not working, he is playing in his studio with all sorts of doodles, drawings, doo-dads, and trinkets.
