

Night Breeze

*By
Stephen Wright*

*Illustrated
by Ilhwa Gloria Kim*



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.

Written by Stephen Wright

Illustrated by Ilhwa Gloria Kim

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Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans and

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First Edition

~ Dedications ~

To my wife Cyndi and our two boys, Ian and Matt,
who remind me daily of the importance of
taking time to look up.

And to Ian's birth mother, for bringing him
into this world to shine and take his place
among the stars.

~ Stephen Wright ~


For my great mentors, my mother and Aunt Amy,
without whom I could not have made it this far.

~ Ilhwa Gloria Kim ~

Ian's mom was a dreamer,
and oh, how she loved
the stars.

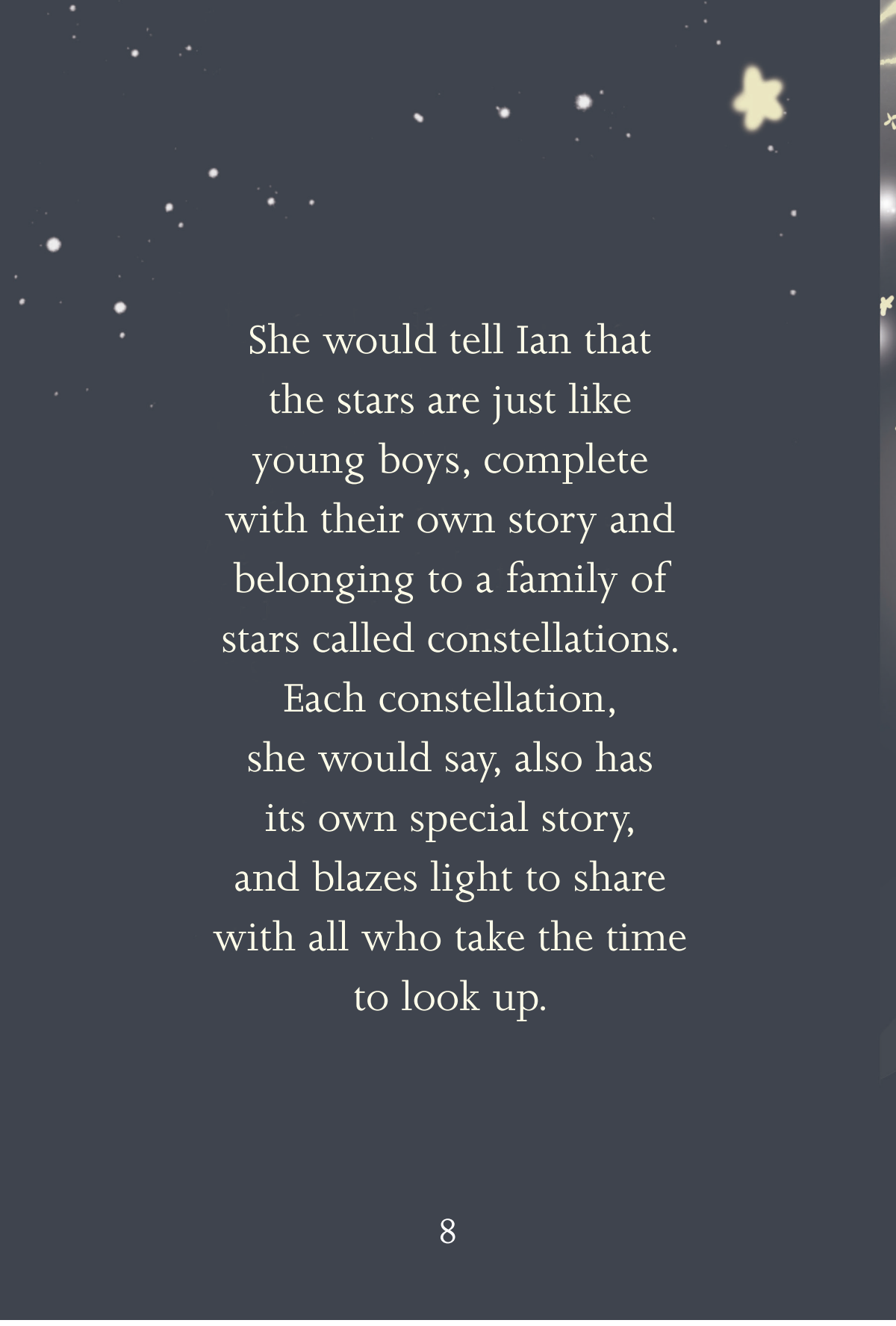


Some nights, while other boys were tucked into bed and read a nighttime story, she would wrap Ian in his favorite blanket and take him outside to gaze at the stars, strung like Christmas lights across the night sky.



The sky seemed like
the biggest and brightest
picture book ever created.
Ian liked to imagine that
his mom could read
the night sky just like a
pirate reads a map,
carefully connecting
the dots until the treasure
is discovered.

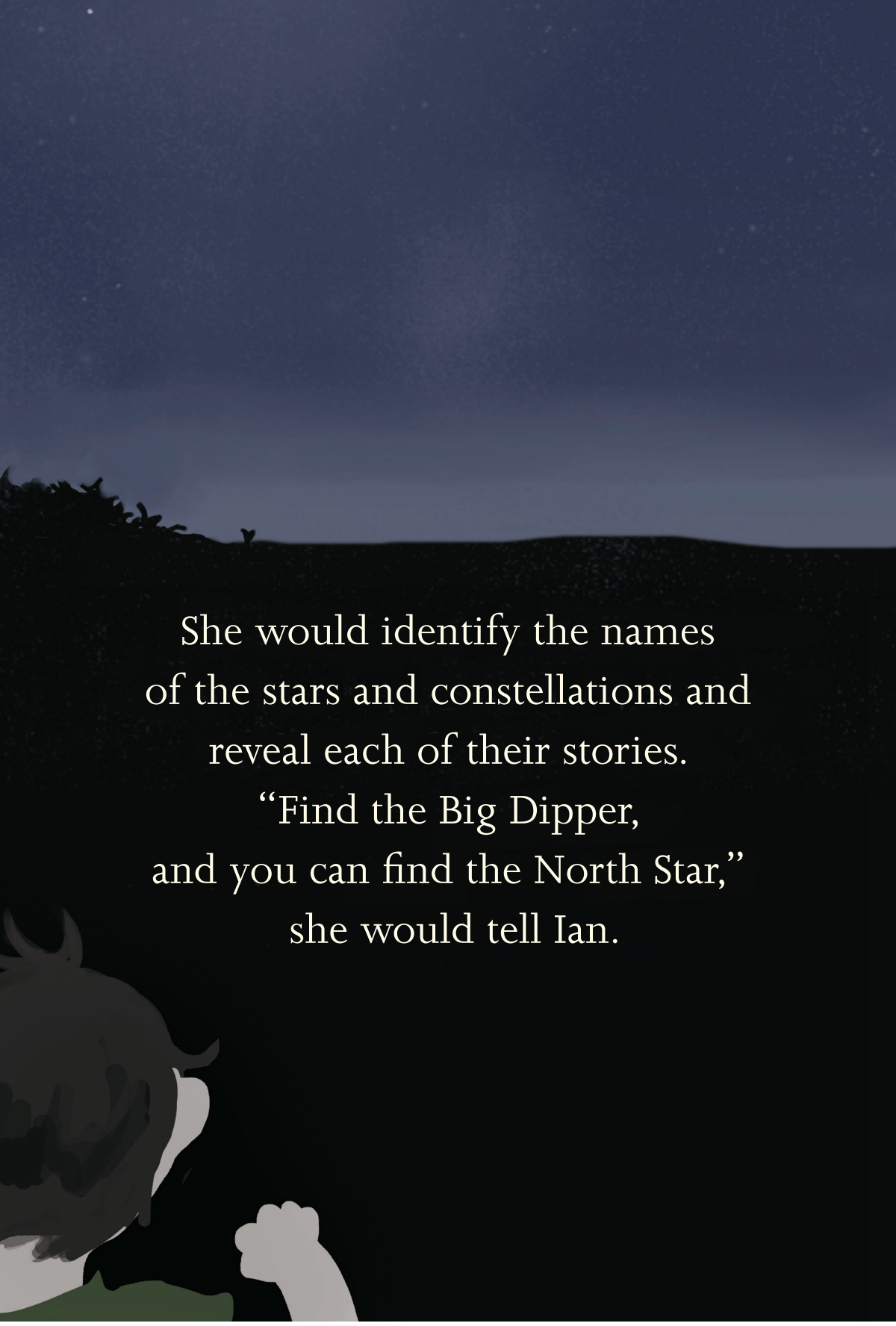




She would tell Ian that
the stars are just like
young boys, complete
with their own story and
belonging to a family of
stars called constellations.

Each constellation,
she would say, also has
its own special story,
and blazes light to share
with all who take the time
to look up.





She would identify the names
of the stars and constellations and
reveal each of their stories.

“Find the Big Dipper,
and you can find the North Star,”
she would tell Ian.



“The North Star will guide you
through darkness to light.
It is always pointing true north and
always pointing home.”
They would always end their star show
by finding the Big Dipper.



Ian would fall asleep
each night under his blanket
and the blanket of stars.

When Ian awoke the next day,
the stars' lights in the sky were
turned off and no longer visible.

Yet his mother always assured
Ian that they were still shining.

When the day gave way to night,
she would point up to the stars—
which had reappeared in the sky and
were shining on the night canvas—
and find her favorite constellation,
the Big Dipper.

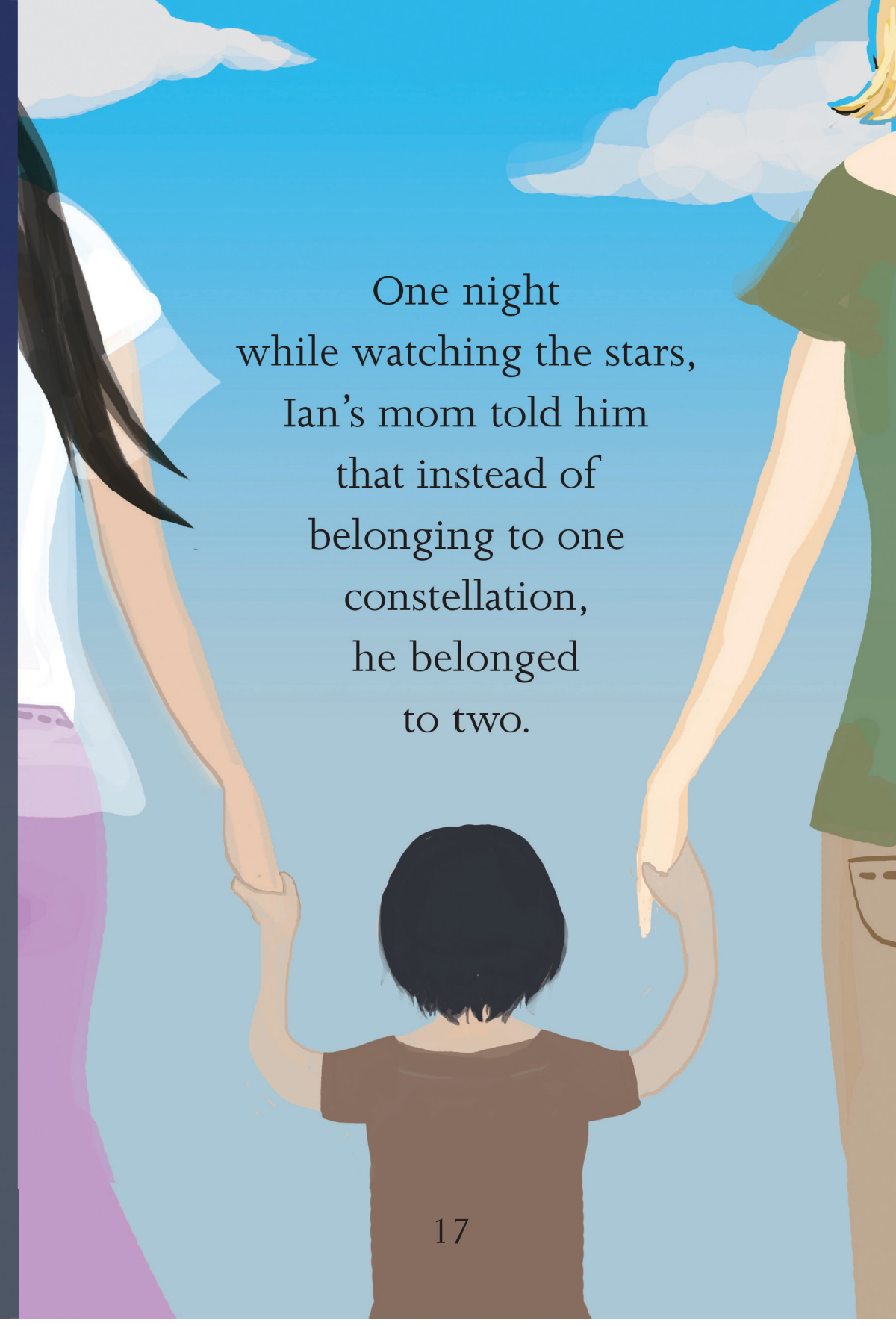




She would tell Ian that the Big Dipper
was just like a mother's love for
her child: big and bright and constant,
even when she couldn't be seen.

Ian liked these star nights
with his mom the best.



An illustration of a child with short dark hair, wearing a brown t-shirt, seen from behind. The child is holding the hands of two adults. The adult on the left has long dark hair and is wearing a white shirt and a purple skirt. The adult on the right has blonde hair and is wearing a green t-shirt and tan pants. They are standing under a blue sky with white clouds and small white stars. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

One night
while watching the stars,
Ian's mom told him
that instead of
belonging to one
constellation,
he belonged
to two.

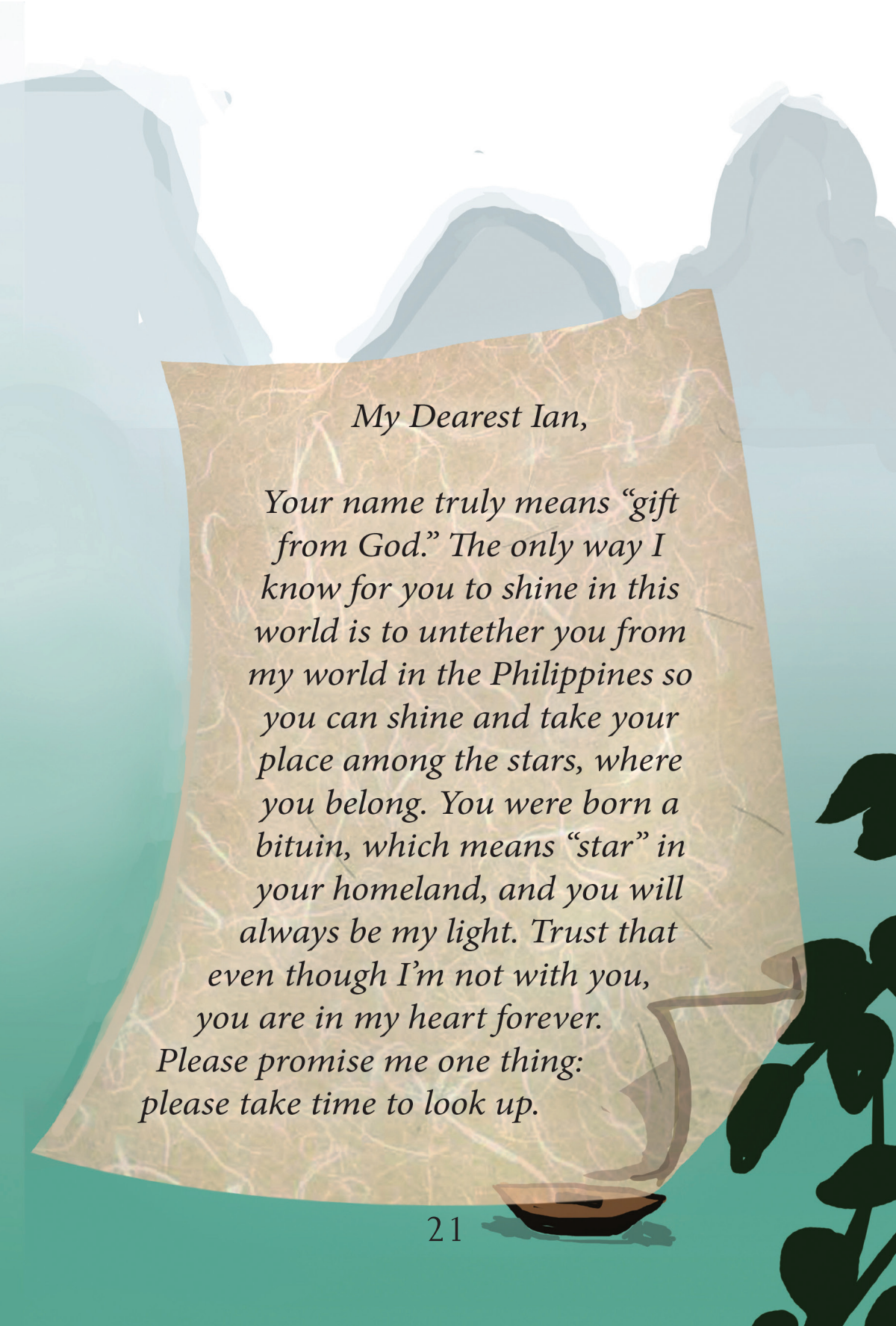
Ian learned the story of his adoption
and how he was carefully and
lovingly left on the doorstep of an
orphanage far away in a country
named the Philippines when he was
just a newborn baby.

He was wrapped in a basket with
a bundle of blankets, a bottle,
a rattle, a copy of the book
Goodnight Moon, a bottle of
his birth mother's favorite perfume
named *Night Breeze*...



The background is a soft, painterly illustration of a landscape. In the upper half, there are large, rounded mountain peaks in shades of light blue and white, suggesting mist or snow. On the left side, a waterfall flows down a rocky cliff, depicted with light green and white strokes. The lower half of the image is a calm body of water in a teal-green color. Two small, dark brown wooden boats are floating on the water. One boat is in the bottom left corner, and the other is slightly to the right and higher up. The text "...and a love note:" is centered in the middle of the image.

...and a love note:

The background features a stylized illustration of three blue mountains under a white sky. In the foreground, a small brown boat with a white sail is on a teal body of water. To the right, there are black silhouettes of leaves and branches.

My Dearest Ian,

Your name truly means “gift from God.” The only way I know for you to shine in this world is to untether you from my world in the Philippines so you can shine and take your place among the stars, where you belong. You were born a bituin, which means “star” in your homeland, and you will always be my light. Trust that even though I’m not with you, you are in my heart forever. Please promise me one thing: please take time to look up.

Sometimes during the day,
sadness would creep into
Ian's heart, because when
he looked up the stars were
not visible and he could
not locate the Big Dipper
or the North Star.
Ian could not understand
why his birth mother
left him behind.

Ian felt that his heart
was like the falling stars
he had witnessed some
nights, falling quickly
and disappearing without
warning from the canopy
of light in the sky.



Other times,
Ian would imagine
his birth mother
staring up at the
Big Dipper
from somewhere
in the world and
wonder if she
remembered him
when he was no
longer visible to
her in daylight.



At these times,
Ian discovered
something else:
his heart worked even
when it was broken.
He knew this because
it ached.

Ian decided to look up.

He went to his room, carefully removed the cap of his birth mother's favorite perfume, and sprayed a fine mist. The fragrance leaped into the air and cascaded down, just like the meteor showers he had watched countless times with his mother.



The bottle of perfume read
Night Breeze, but Ian knew better:
the bottle contained magic.



Like magic, his loneliness
disappeared and the fragrance
started to mend his heart,
just like his cat Molly seeking
her way into his lap—
slow and unsure at first,
then purposefully kneading
and pawing her way until
she was nuzzled close
to his heart for a welcome visit.

Suddenly, alone in his room
without a star visible,
Ian discovered that he could take
his place among the stars to shine,
just as both his mothers
wished for him to do.
Ian learned that a mother's love
is bigger than the night sky
and more precious than any
pirate's treasure chest.



STEPHEN WRIGHT

When Steve Wright was younger, his heroes were athletes who could hit the ball the farthest, throw the hardest, or run the fastest. As Steve grew older, he came to realize that the true heroes are our storytellers. The true power of a story lies in its ability to meet readers where they are at and to simultaneously transport and transform them. As a fifth grade teacher, Steve's best days in the classroom are when storytellers come and cast their spell on his students in ways that no one else can reach them. Steve bats right and throws right.

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In gratitude to the following story lovers who helped me along the way: my wife Cyndi and son Ian; my parents, Marian and Bob Wright; Jon Odell; Tracey Joyce; Elsa Batika; and Drew Sieplinga and the staff at Wild Rumpus bookstore.

ILHWA GLORIA KIM is a student artist pursuing a degree in art and psychology at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, with an emphasis on animation. Ms. Kim is mostly self-taught, and digital painting is her favorite type of illustration. Inspired by children, she often volunteers at different events as a face painter or art project instructor.