


Angela Pham Krans  Caldecott Honoree Thi Bui

Finding Papa

Krans

Bui

FINDING PAPA

No one can make Mai laugh like her Papa!

She loves playing their favorite game—the crocodile **CHOMP CHOMP!** But then Papa leaves Vietnam in search of a new home for their family in America, and Mai misses him very much. Until one day when Mama and Mai pack a small bag and say goodbye to the only home Mai has ever known. And so begins Mai and Mama's long, perilous journey, by foot and by boat, through dangers and darkness, to find Papa and start their new life—together.

Angela Pham Krans' lyrical debut picture book, based on her own experience as a child and powerfully brought to life by Caldecott Honor artist Thi Bui's vivid illustrations, reminds us that love and courage can stretch an ocean and that nothing can keep us apart from those we care about.

Angela Pham Krans

is a children's book author who enjoys writing anywhere with access to Cuban coffee or chocolate croissants. When Angela was finally reunited with her papa, she did not recognize him with his bushy mustache. But Papa won her over with plenty of toys and treats! Angela lives in Atlanta with her husband and two rambunctious dogs. You can connect with her at www.angelakrans.com.

Thi Bui

is a cartoonist, an educator, a mom, and a restless explorer. Best known for her bestselling graphic memoir, *The Best We Could Do*, she has also illustrated the children's books *Chicken of the Sea* and *A Different Pond*, for which she won a Caldecott Honor. You can find her work and interviews at www.thibui.com.


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For my parents, the bravest people I know. And
for Hamilton, my best friend and biggest supporter.

—APK

For Hien. I'll always be your mama,
and you'll always be my love.

—TB

Finding Papa

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by Angela Pham Krans



illustrated by Thi Bui

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Mai's favorite game to play with Papa
was the crocodile chomp. When Papa went

**“CHOMP!
CHOMP!”**

Mai would giggle and squeal.
Crocodiles were scary, but Papa was not.

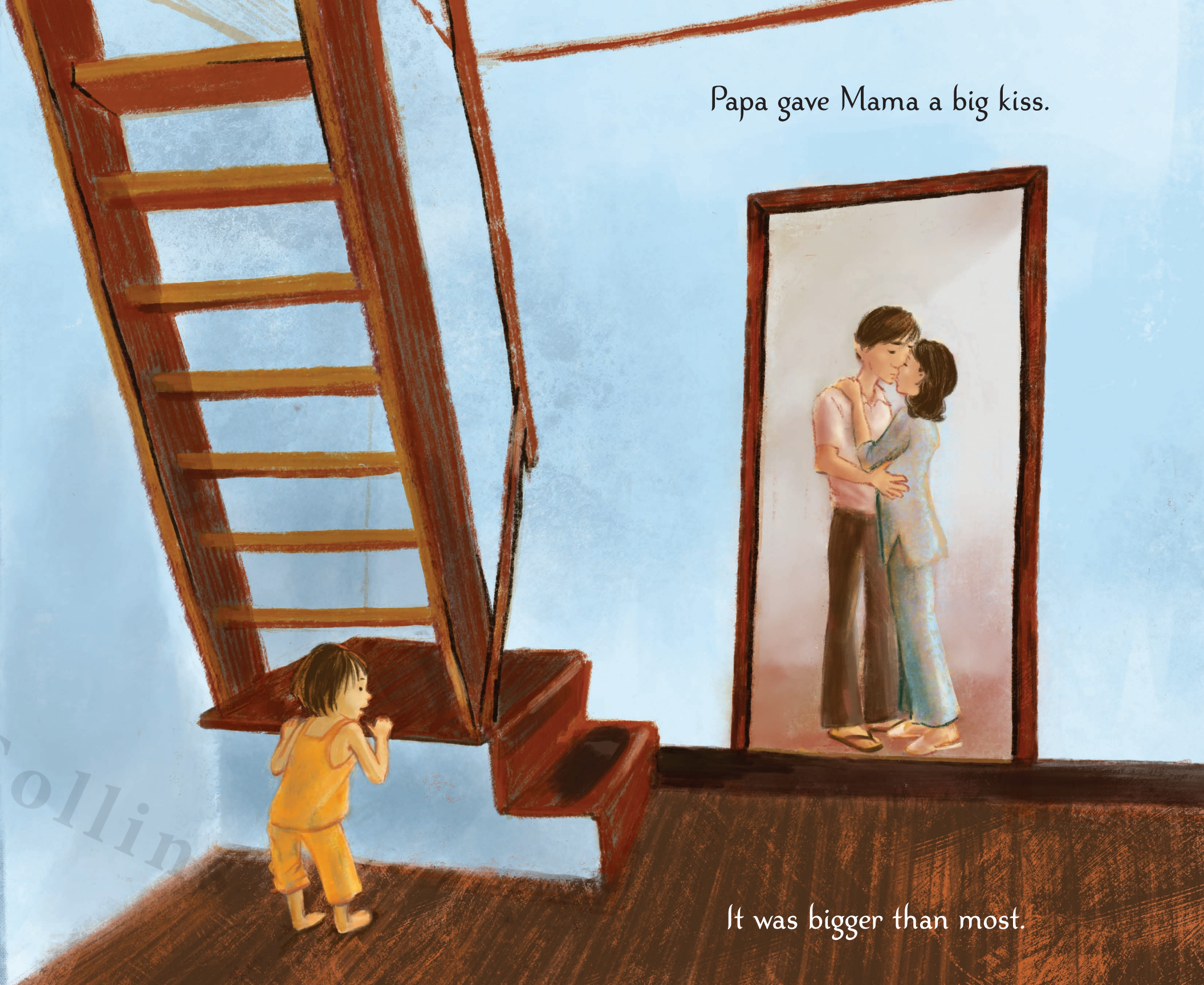


One morning, Papa
gave Mai a long hug.

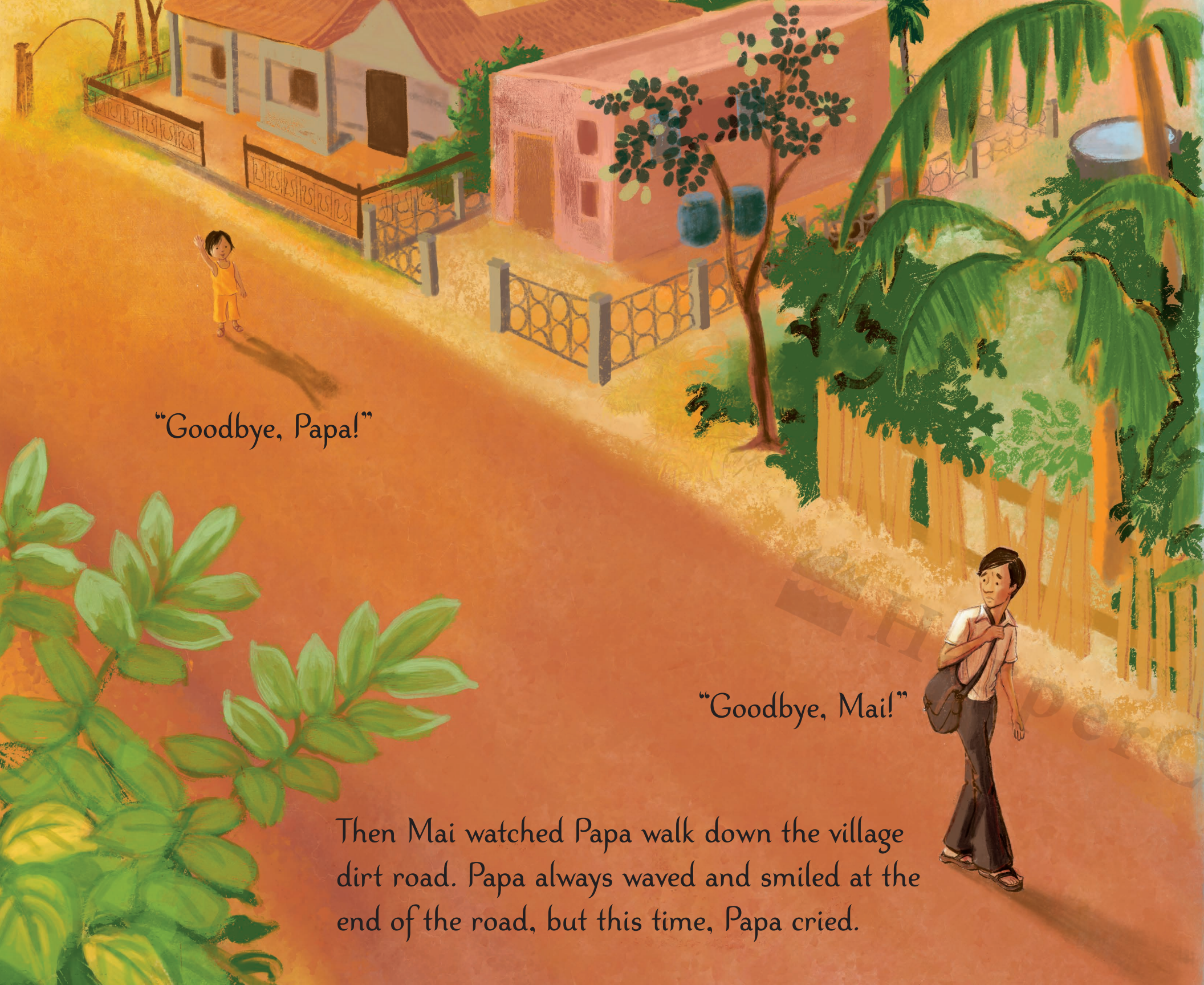


It was longer than usual.

Papa gave Mama a big kiss.



It was bigger than most.



“Goodbye, Papa!”

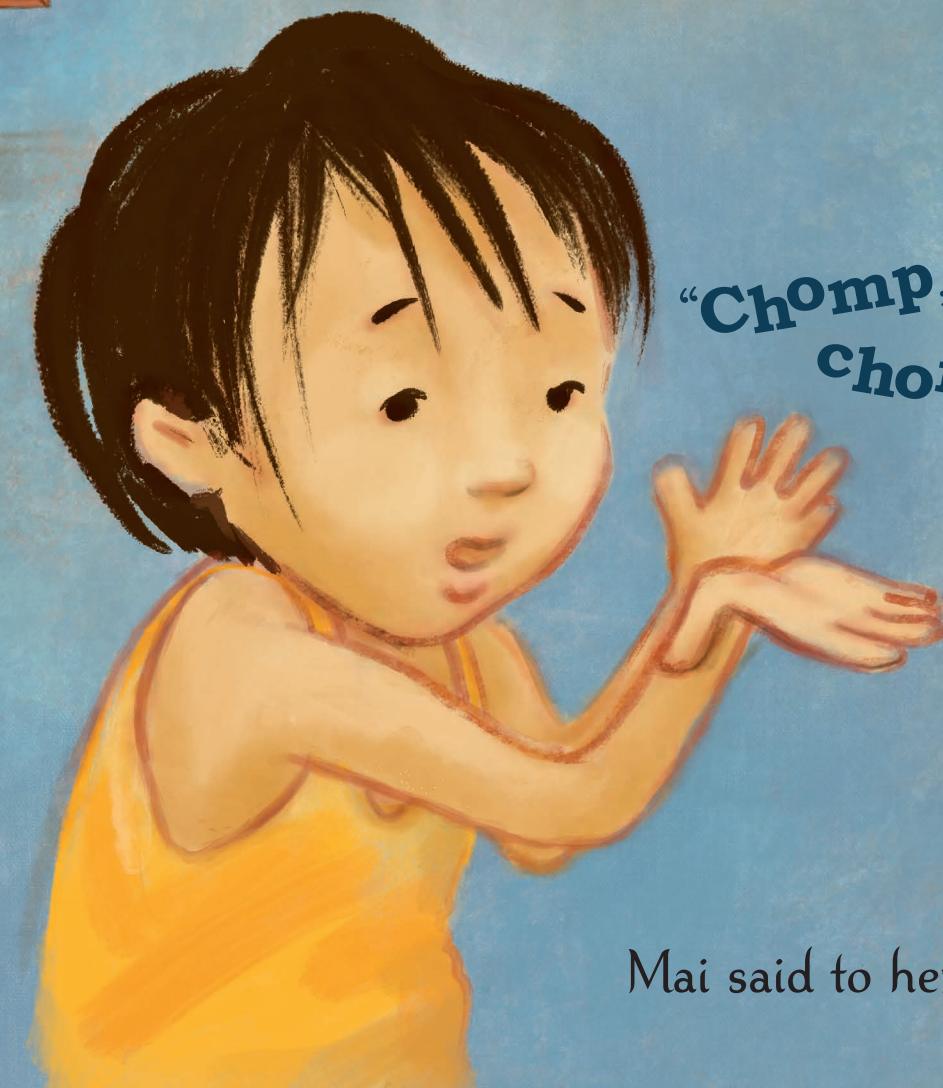
“Goodbye, Mai!”

Then Mai watched Papa walk down the village dirt road. Papa always waved and smiled at the end of the road, but this time, Papa cried.

Papa did not come home for dinner.



He did not come home for playtime, either.



“Chomp,
chomp,”

Mai said to herself.

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By bedtime, Mai was crying.
"Where is Papa?"



"Papa is finding a new home
for us." Mama was crying, too.

They hugged each other until they fell asleep.



Mai waited and waited for Papa to come home.
He never arrived, but his letters did. Some were short,
some were long, but Mai and Mama loved them all.




"I want to see Papa again," Mai said.
"Soon, Mai," Mama said.

One night, Mama packed a small bag.


"Where are we
going, Mama?"

"We are going
to find Papa."






When it was time to leave,
Mai hugged her favorite
mango tree.



She gave her pet
chicken a big kiss.



Then Mai wrapped her arms
around Mama's neck and
hung on her back.

As Mama walked down the village dirt
road, Mai glanced back at her home
one last time. "Goodbye," she whispered.

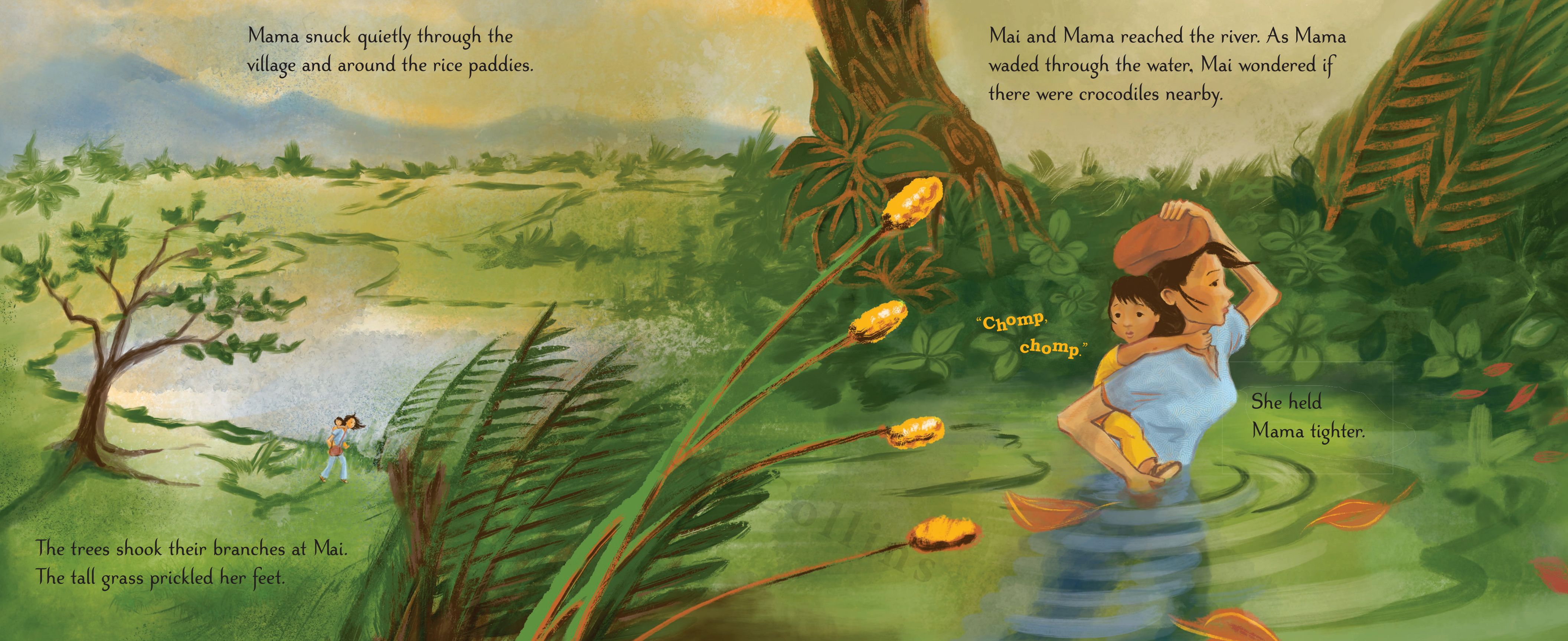
Mama snuck quietly through the village and around the rice paddies.

Mai and Mama reached the river. As Mama waded through the water, Mai wondered if there were crocodiles nearby.

“Chomp,
chomp.”

She held
Mama tighter.

The trees shook their branches at Mai.
The tall grass prickled her feet.



Mai and Mama finally climbed onto a boat that was waiting for them.



Mai looked for Papa, but he was not there.



When Mai awoke, strangers were staring at her. She dug her face into Mama's chest.

"Mama, I'm scared."

"I'm scared, too. Everyone here is looking for their families."

For days, the waves pulled the boat this way. The wind pushed the boat that way. They were surrounded by water, but Mai and Mama had little to drink. At night, Mai's stomach rumbled.

"Chomp, chomp,"

Mai said as she pretended to eat the moon. Mai ached for food and for Papa.



When a big ship sailed by, everyone waved their hands and yelled, "Help us!"

An angry storm came and filled the boat with water.

The men on the ship lowered a big net down, down, down.

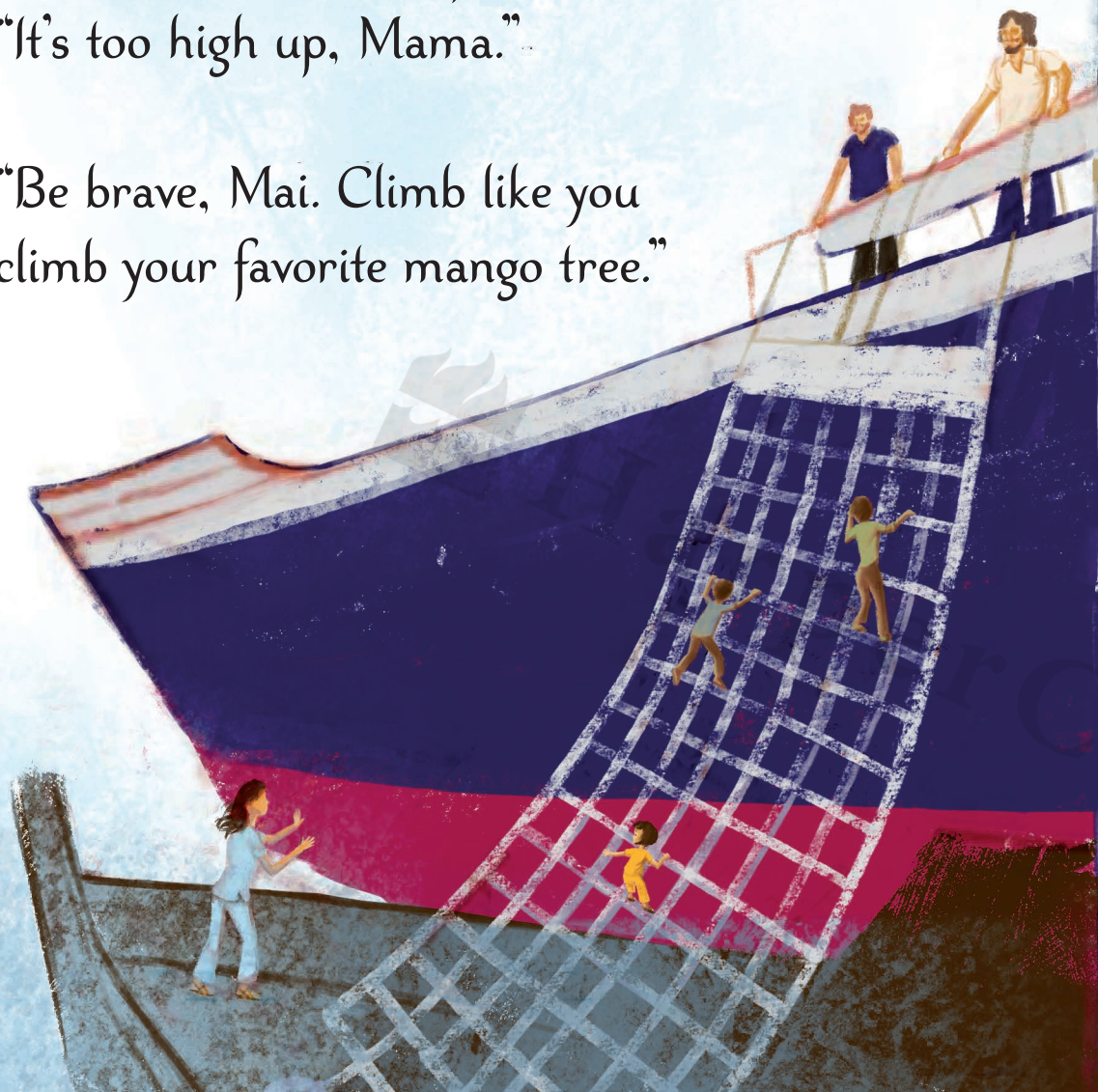


"Climb onto the net," Mama said.

Mai trembled as her feet wobbled with each step.

"It's too high up, Mama."

"Be brave, Mai. Climb like you climb your favorite mango tree."



As Mai looked down, it was Mama's turn to climb. Mai yelled as loudly as she could into the wind.

"Be brave, Mama!"



As Mama reached the top, hands stretched out to help her onto the ship.



The ship carried Mai and Mama to a new land where they were surrounded by other people who were rescued from the ocean, too. People in uniform gave them clean water, food, and a place to sleep.

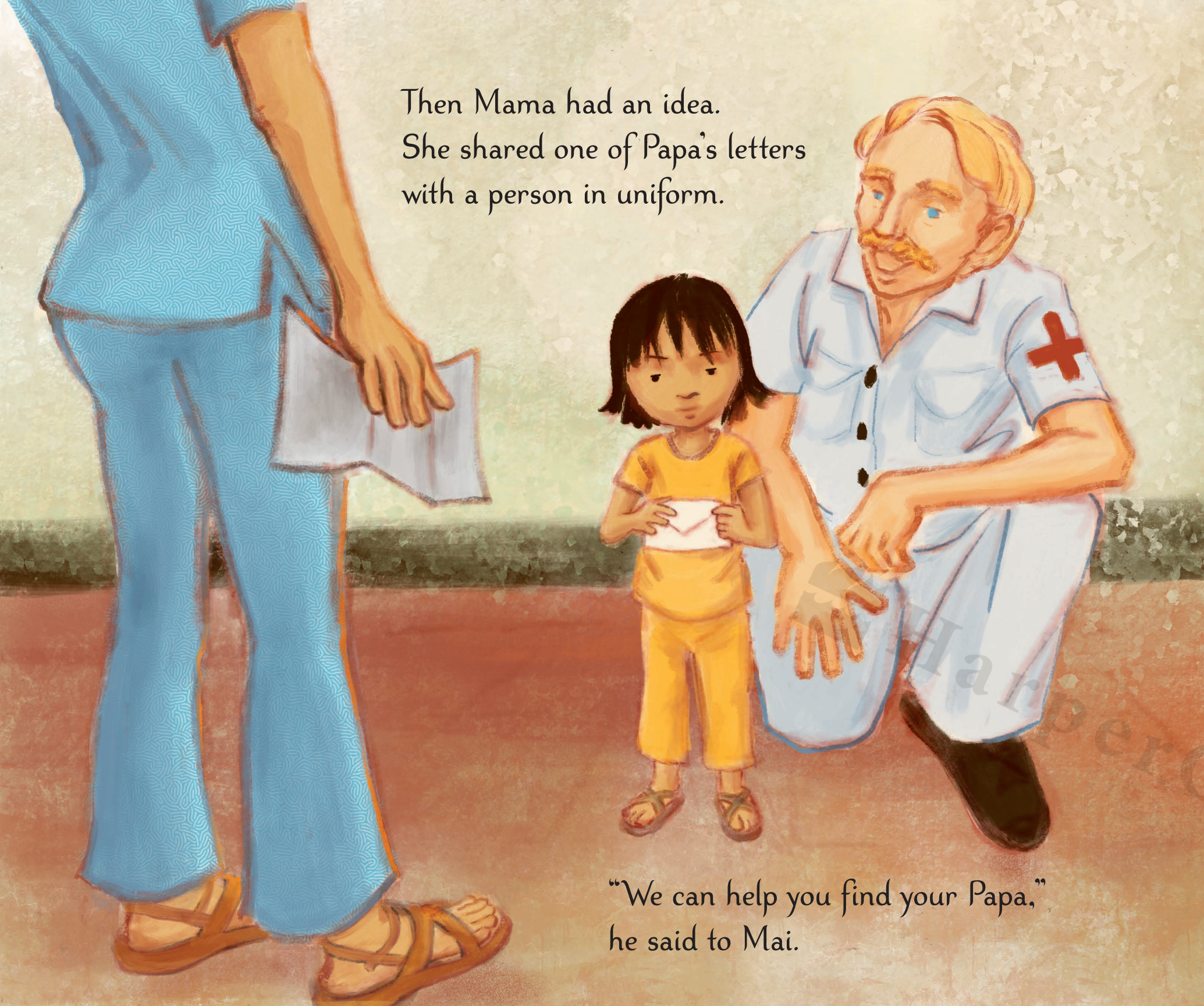
Mai searched for Papa.
“Is he here, Mama?”

“No, Mai. Papa was here before us.”




Mama lead Mai to a house marked with a number 11 and pointed to the message Papa had left for them.

Mai believed in Papa's words.
“**Chomp, chomp!**”
Mai cheered.



Then Mama had an idea.
She shared one of Papa's letters
with a person in uniform.

"We can help you find your Papa,"
he said to Mai.



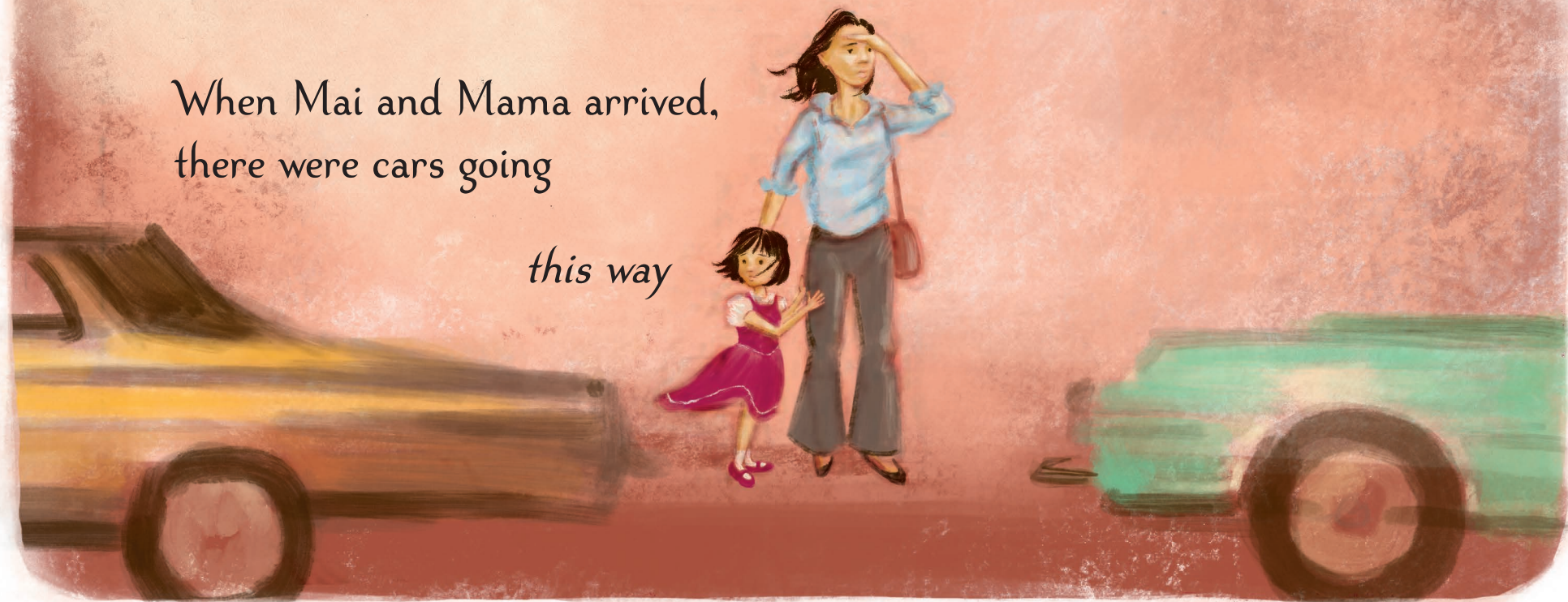
One day, Mama packed
a small bag again.

"Where are we
going now, Mama?"

"We are going to America."

When Mai and Mama arrived,
there were cars going

this way



and

that way.



Through the crowd, Mai saw a man
run toward them. Mai did not know
this man with a mustache. She grabbed
Mama's hand and hid behind her legs.

As he came closer, the man with the mustache
crouched on the ground and went,

**“CHOMP!
CHOMP!”**

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Mai and Mama giggled.
Crocodiles were scary . . .



But Papa was not.



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 **Author's Note** 

Finding Papa is based on the real-life journey that my mother and I braved from Vietnam to America in 1983 to reunite with my father. My father had left the country, hoping to find a better opportunity in America to support his family. Along this terrifying journey, we met people who helped us get one step closer to my father. A Nedlloyd Dutch shipping vessel saved my mother and me after we drifted on the ocean for days with little food and drink. The vessel dropped us off at a refugee camp in Singapore, where the American Red Cross helped reunite our family using letters that my father had written to us.

Our family's story is part of a much larger one. When the Vietnam War ended in 1975, thousands of people, referred to as the "boat people," fled the country on boats to escape the political and economic hardships of that time. Their journeys were often met by pirates, storms, and starvation. Some stories ended at sea, while others were the beginning of a new life, but every story is one of unyielding hope and courage.

 **Artist's Note** 

To be a survivor is to live with a powerful, sometimes overwhelming mixture of gratitude and grief. In 1978, when I was three, my parents packed me into the cargo hold of a riverboat in Cần Thơ, Việt Nam, and set out to sea, along with my two older sisters and my little brother, who was still in the womb. There were forty people (including my brother) aboard a little round-bottomed boat that had no business being on the open sea. The only person who knew how to drive a boat or navigate at sea became incapacitated on the first night, and, after others floundered, my father stepped up into the role of pilot until we landed on the shore of Malaysia three days later. My mother gave birth just outside the refugee camp in the village midwife's hut. Thanks to my parents' bravery and resourcefulness, along with a miraculous alignment of circumstances, we all survived and made it to our destination: America.

Now that I am older, I have a better understanding of just how hard that journey was. I still grieve the people and lives that were lost. I am grateful to have stories and art as a place to put that understanding, and to share it with you. Angela's story reminds me of Mister Rogers's advice to look for the helpers in hard times, and I think that is very wise counsel.