



Aya and the Butterfly

by Dr Maysoon Salama
illustrations by Jenny Cooper





This story is dedicated to the children and whānau of the Aotearoa New Zealand Muslim community, whose lives were changed forever on 15 March 2019.



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Aya is at the market with Aunt Haneen and Uncle Abdallah and her grandparents. Yu Yan is selling swan plants.

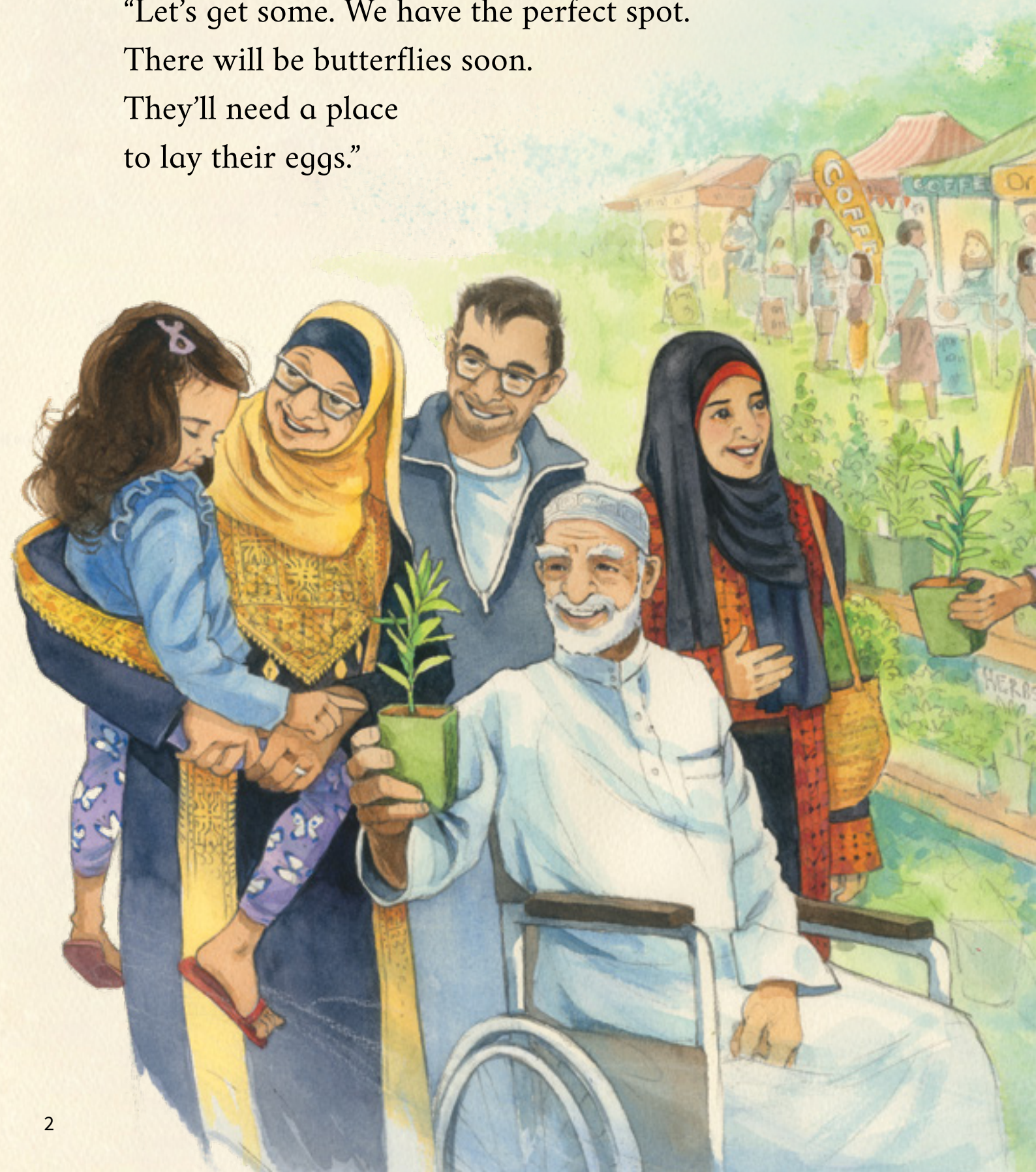
“Swan plants!” Grandad says to Aya.

“Let’s get some. We have the perfect spot.

There will be butterflies soon.

They’ll need a place

to lay their eggs.”



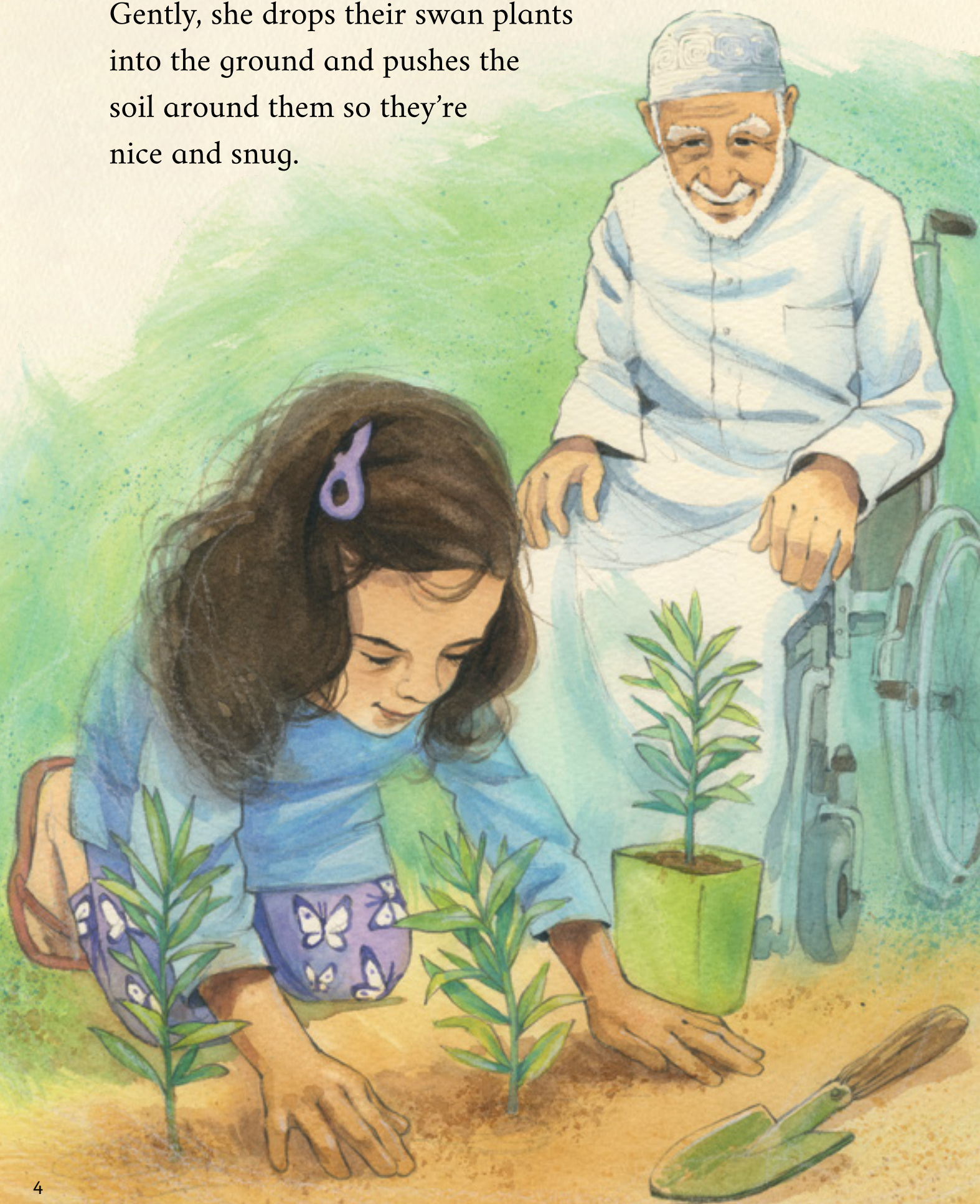


Yu Yan also has tomato plants,
lined up in their little green pots.
“Shall we grow some of them too?”
Grandma asks.

Aya shakes her head. She doesn’t
want to grow tomatoes, not this year.



Aya digs four holes beside the fence.
Gently, she drops their swan plants
into the ground and pushes the
soil around them so they're
nice and snug.





Dad made this garden. Aya remembers him turning the soil with his new blue spade. She misses him every day. Sometimes, Grandma stands in the garden, crying. Granddad says it's good to cry. "We need to let the sadness out," he tells Aya.



Aya and Grandad water the swan plants every morning. On hot days, they water in the evening too. Grandad explains that soon, tiny white flowers will appear. These will turn into hairy green seed pods.



At first, the butterflies don't find the swan plants. Aya watches them try out the squash and the beans. She watches them flutter above the mint.

"Don't worry," says Grandad. "They'll figure it out."

One morning, Aya sees white specks on the swan plants' leaves. There are so many – maybe hundreds! Grandad nods and smiles when she shows him. "Eggs," he says. "Give it a week, then things will really get interesting!"



Aya isn't there when the first caterpillars hatch, but she sees the tiny creatures start to eat. They eat so much – soon there will be no leaves left. If more caterpillars come, her swan plants might die and the caterpillars will go hungry. “Why can't Dad be here to help?” she thinks. He'd know what to do.



Grandad says they should buy more swan plants.

Grandma has a better idea. “Put a net over those plants,” she says. “It will stop the butterflies laying more eggs.”



When the aphids come, Aya knows what to do.
She's seen these tiny pests before – they used to eat
Dad's tomato plants.

“We need to plant marigolds,” she tells Grandad.
“Aphids don't like their smell.”

So they went back to visit Yu Yan.



The caterpillars are huge. They can hardly move. Finally, they stop eating. They hang upside down on the leaves and spin themselves into tight, shiny chrysalises.

“Now we wait,” says Grandad.

Aya had loved watching the caterpillars’ striped bodies become fatter and fatter. Now there’s nothing happening. “Be patient,” Grandad says.

So Aya waits, trying to be patient. Then one Friday, when Grandad is at the mosque, she notices that one chrysalis has changed. She can see the colours of a butterfly’s wings, folded inside like a secret.

When Grandad arrives home, Aya takes him out to the garden. The chrysalis has begun to separate.






Aya and Grandad watch the butterfly emerge from its chrysalis ... slowly, carefully. The wings are small and damp and crumpled.

“Give it time,” says Grandad. “Soon it will look magnificent.”





The butterfly hangs upside down, drying its wings.
It's not ready to fly just yet. But Aya is good at
being patient now.



Aya's butterfly opens and closes its wings one last time, to be sure they are dry, then lifts into the air. It flutters in slow circles like a golden leaf.

"I wish Dad could see our butterfly," says Aya.

"Me too," says Granddad.

The butterfly lands on Aya's outstretched hand. She is careful to stand very still. She doesn't want the butterfly to leave, ever. It is too beautiful.

Grandma knows how she is feeling. "The butterfly has to leave," she says gently. "You need to say goodbye, Aya."

Aya lifts her arm, and the butterfly flies away. Above their heads, it looks even more beautiful.





Life Cycle of a Butterfly



Egg

The butterfly lays an egg.

The egg hatches.



Larva

The caterpillar eats and grows.



Pre-pupa

The caterpillar transforms into a chrysalis.



Pupa

Inside the chrysalis, the caterpillar becomes a butterfly (called metamorphosis).



Adult

