To my father (rahimullah), who taught me to be myself
fully, openly, and without shame
—J.T.-B.

For those who are struggling to find a place
—H.A.

Also illustrated by Hatem Aly:

The Proudest Blue

The Kindest Red

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SALAT IN SECRET

JAMILAH
THOMPKINS-BIGELOW

HATEM ALY

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Daddy's joy is bigger than him. It's a wide, gap-toothed smile and a deep rumbling laugh that shakes the dinner table kind of joy. That joy is biggest on my birthday when he gives me a salat rug.

"You're seven now, Muhammad!
Old enough to pray five times a day!"

I run my finger along the rug's fuzzy patterns and gold stitching. Its too-sweet incense smell tickles my nose.

Before prayer that night, I make wudu, washing carefully.

During salat, I don't rock and sway. My fingers don't tap-dance. No making funny faces at Maryama. I am too old for that now.

I am still. Like Daddy. When I press my forehead on that velvety rug, I repeat words learned in Sunday school. I whisper my most-wished-for wishes to Allah.

After I pray fajr the next morning, I know I'll do dhuhr too. Dhuhr comes in the middle of the school day. Somehow, I'll find a secret place to do it. Somehow, asking won't be scary.