AUTHOR'S NOTE

Millions of children all over the world are refugees like I was. As I write, there are more than 43 million children who have had to leave their homes because it isn't safe for them to stay there. They leave behind their toys, their friends, their schools – and may never get to see their grandparents, aunts or uncles, and cousins again. Sometimes children are separated from their parents. And, like our family, refugees are often sent from one country to another, not welcome no matter where they go.

Refugees sometimes live in tents where they have no water or electricity. Or they live in crowded apartments or houses, hiding from people who want to send them back to the dangerous places where they used to live. They may be living far away in another country, or they might be living nearby.

Our family went from Kurdistan to Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Russia, the Netherlands, and finally the United Kingdom. Over the course of four years, we travelled by car, by boat, by foot, by van, by ferry, by plane and by train. In Russia, we were robbed by people who pretended to help us and left us stranded; we told the police but instead of helping us, they ripped up our refugee papers. Sometimes we were even put in jail.

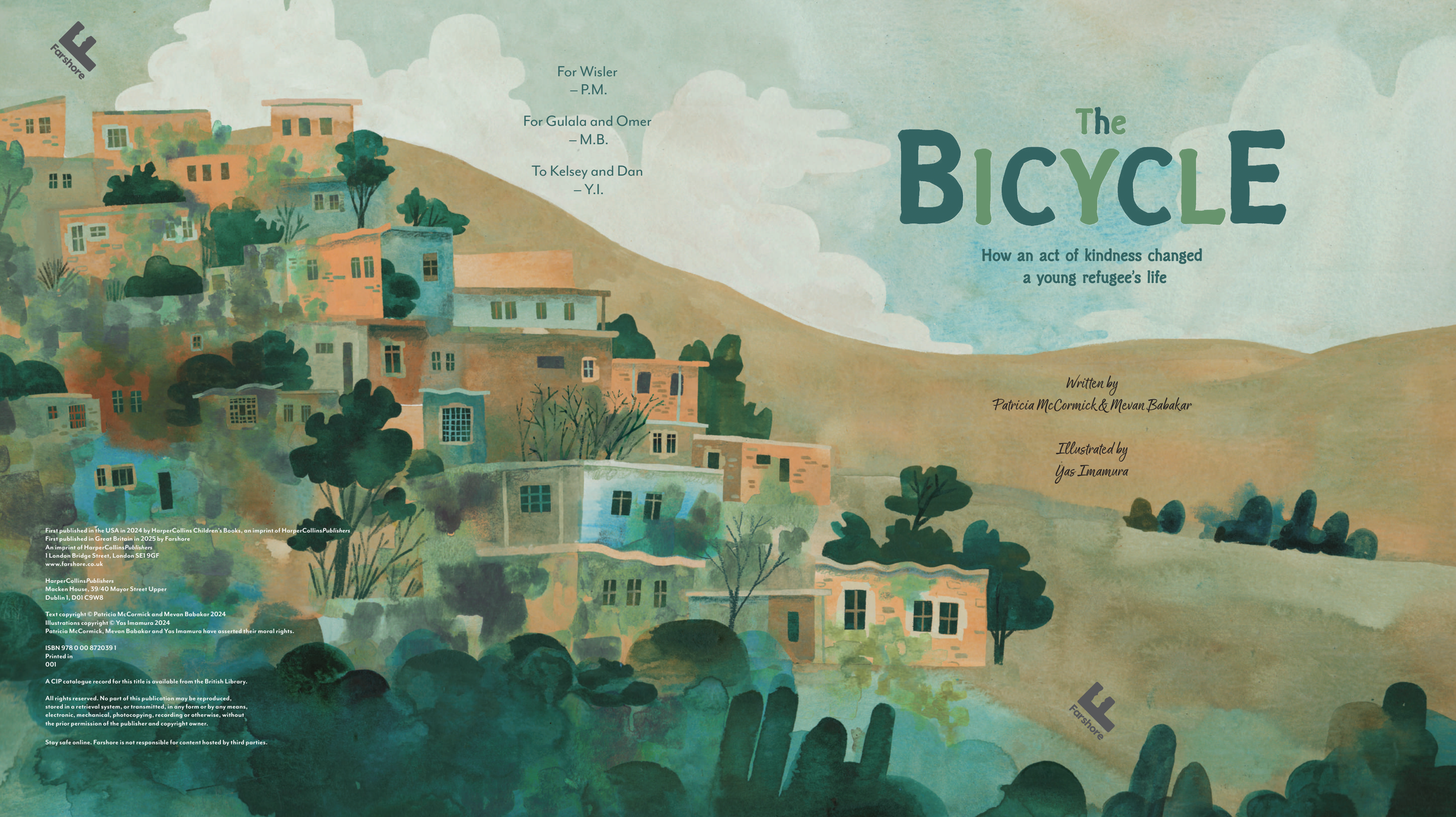
We eventually escaped to the Netherlands, but there wasn't enough money for my father to come too. He had to stay in Russia for four more years and I wasn't sure I'd ever see him again.

Finally, our family was reunited in the United Kingdom, where we found a safe and happy home. But there are many times when I still feel like an outsider. I am proud of my parents for their bravery and proud of myself and my family for the way we made a home for ourselves no matter where we were. Being a refugee will always be a part of who I am – and it's made me aware of the ways all of us can feel like outsiders, no matter where we come from.

But it's also taught me about the miraculous power of kindness. It was always the small kindnesses that stuck with me as I was growing up. One small and generous act made me feel noticed. After all the ways in which the world had told me that I didn't matter, thanks to Egbert and this gift, at least for a little while, I could be like every other kid – just a little girl riding her bike.



– Mevan Babakar



For Wisler
– P.M.

For Gulala and Omer
– M.B.

To Kelsey and Dan
– Y.I.

The BICYCLE

How an act of kindness changed a young refugee's life

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First published in the USA in 2024 by HarperCollins Children's Books, an imprint of HarperCollins*Publishers*
First published in Great Britain in 2025 by Farshore
An imprint of HarperCollins*Publishers*
1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF
www.farshore.co.uk

HarperCollins*Publishers*
Macken House, 39/40 Mayor Street Upper
Dublin 1, D01 C9W8

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ISBN 978 0 00 872039 1
Printed in
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When Mevan was a little girl, she lived in a land where figs fell from the trees and the air smelled like honeysuckle.

In the morning, she'd wake to the sound of the rooster crowing. And in the evening, she'd fall asleep to the sound of the frogs peeping.





Each day, she'd recite a little bit of poetry.
To her mother, who clapped her hands.
To her father, who kissed her forehead.

To her aunts and uncles, who pinched her cheeks.
To her grandmother, who hugged her tight.
To her grandfather, who hugged her tighter.
And to the grocer, who gave her a sweet.



Kurdistan, a lush and hilly corner in the north of Iraq,
was her home. Her family had always lived here.

Not just her parents. Her parents' parents. Her parents'
parents' parents. Her parents' parents' parents' parents.
And while Mevan may have been the littlest girl in her
family, the love all around her made her feel ten feet tall.



But the ruler of Iraq had always made the people in Kurdistan feel like they didn't belong. Soon, Kurds were being punished for speaking their own language. Or using their Kurdish names. Or celebrating their holidays.



Then he sent soldiers to force them out of their homes.
And helicopters to push them into the mountains.

