


AFRICAN HEARTBEAT

BY BARB CHRISTING

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PHILLIP CISNEROS



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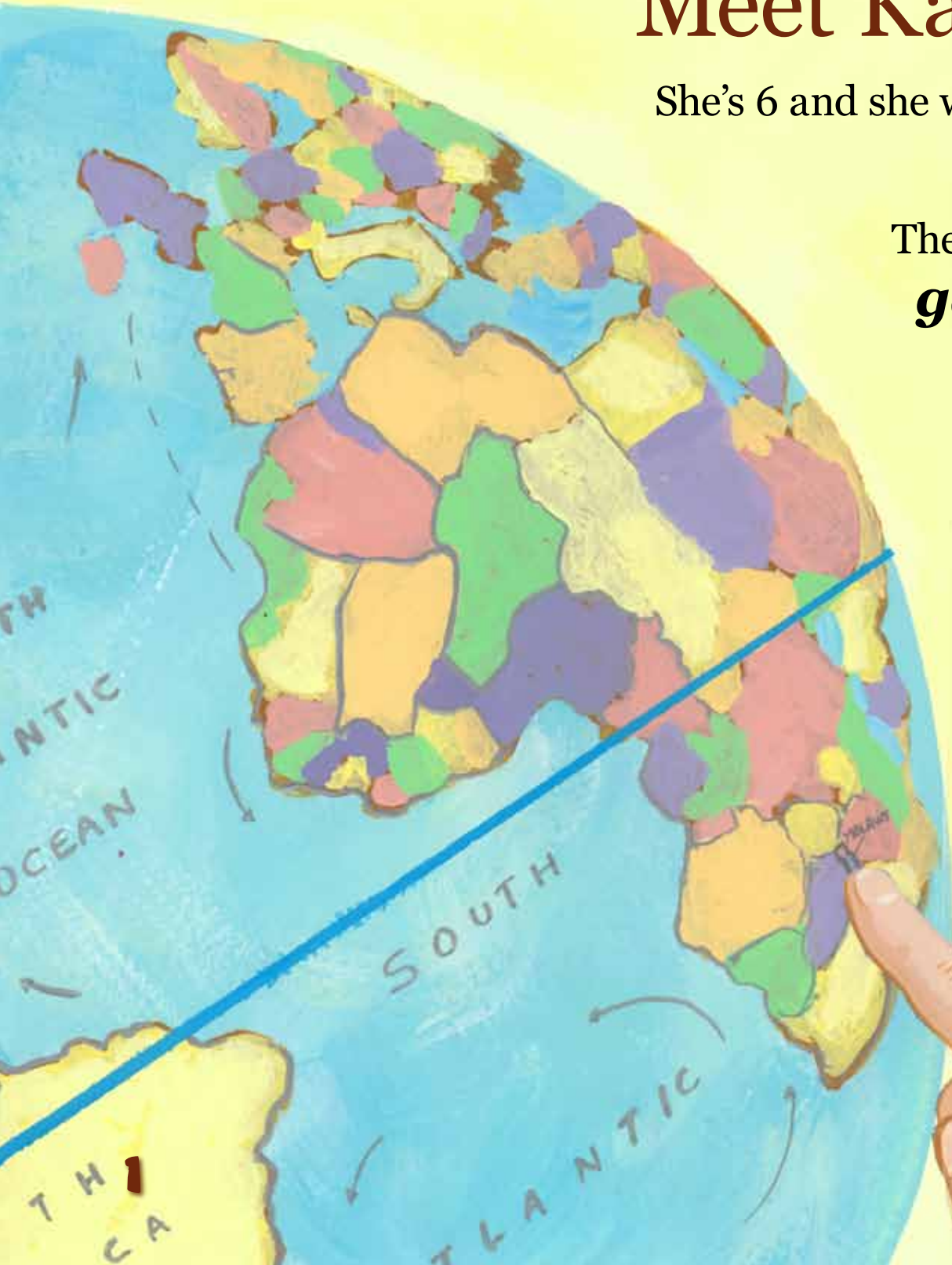
Meet Katie.

She's 6 and she wants to go to Africa.

The only problem is, it takes a ***gazillion*** steps to get there.

But Katie knows the **bigger**
your heart gets, the *smaller*
the world gets.

She learned this from
a song her mother
taught her:



*“Love turns strangers into friends,
It crosses many river bends.
In time love melts the miles away,
And in your heart your friends
will stay.”*

**BOOM-BITY-BOOM-
BITTY-BOOM.**

Can you hear that?

I think Katie’s heart is
growing. So Africa must
be getting closer.



Katie's dream to go to Africa started the day she met **Neema**.
When she saw Neema's face, she knew she had found her new big sister.

"I pick her, Mama."

She was soooooo excited, her heart began to beat like a drum.

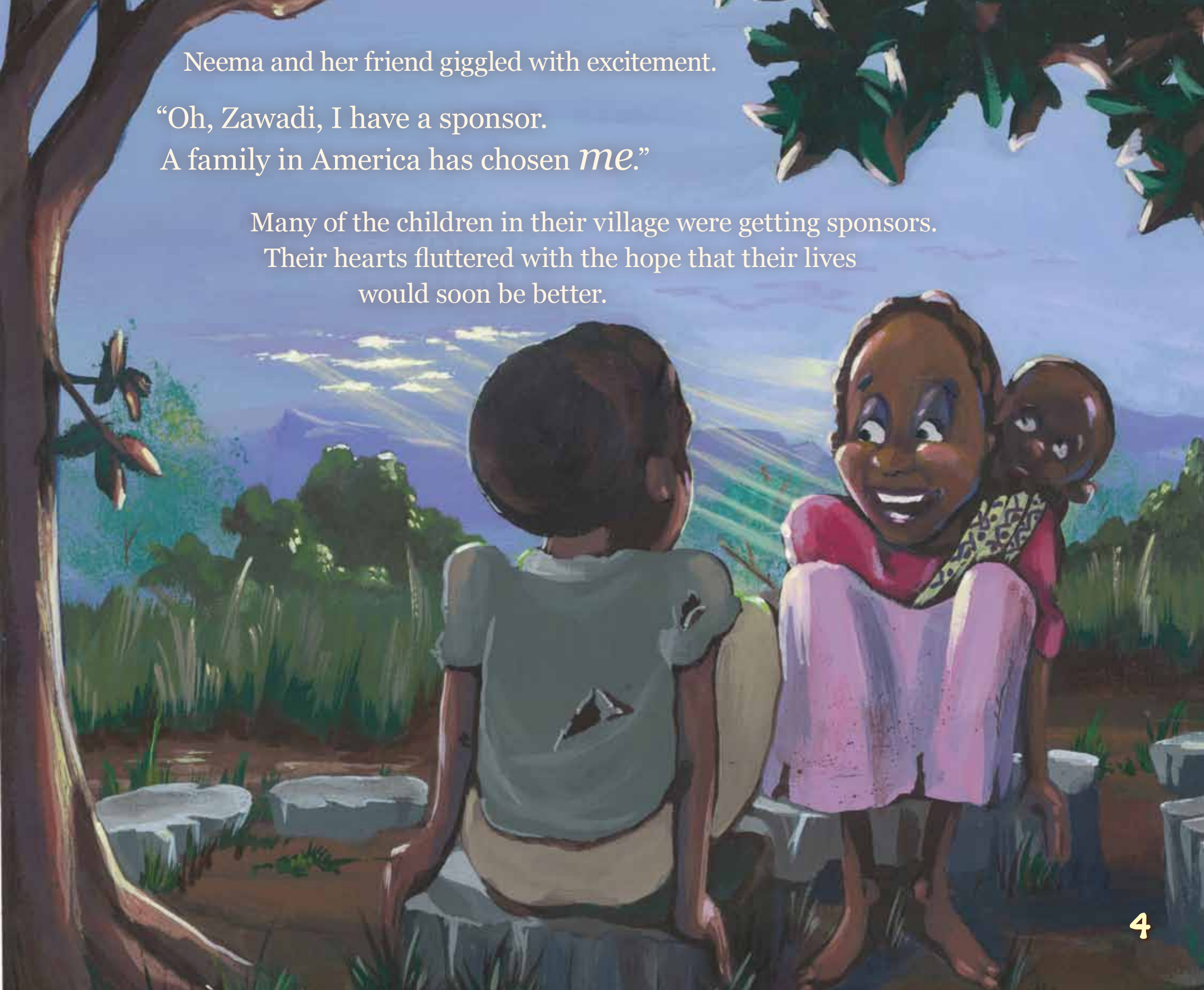
BOOM-BITTY-BOOM
AND A RAT-A-TAT-TAT.



Neema and her friend giggled with excitement.

“Oh, Zawadi, I have a sponsor.
A family in America has chosen *me*.”

Many of the children in their village were getting sponsors.
Their hearts fluttered with the hope that their lives
would soon be better.



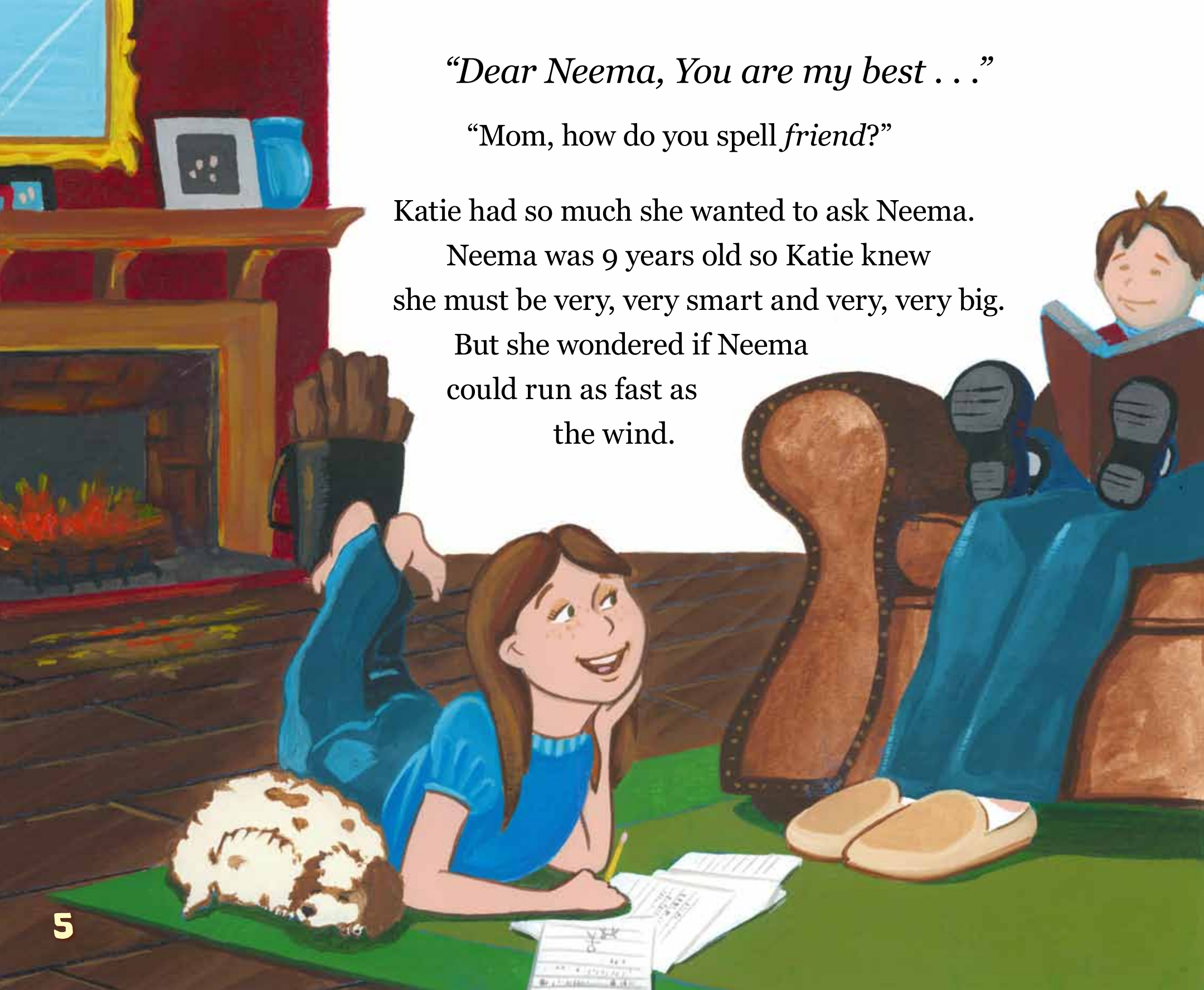
“Dear Neema, You are my best . . .”

“Mom, how do you spell friend?”

Katie had so much she wanted to ask Neema.

Neema was 9 years old so Katie knew she must be very, very smart and very, very big.

But she wondered if Neema could run as fast as the wind.



Neema and her sister *raced* through the slippery mud. They needed to hurry home to help their grandmother cover the grain.

“I hope our roof is not
leaking again.
Hold on, Tumaini . . .

It’s time to *fly*.”

“Mom, why did Neema’s mom and dad die?”

“In Africa, many people have a terrible sickness called AIDS,” answered Katie’s mom. “And they have no money to buy the medicine that can help them feel better.”

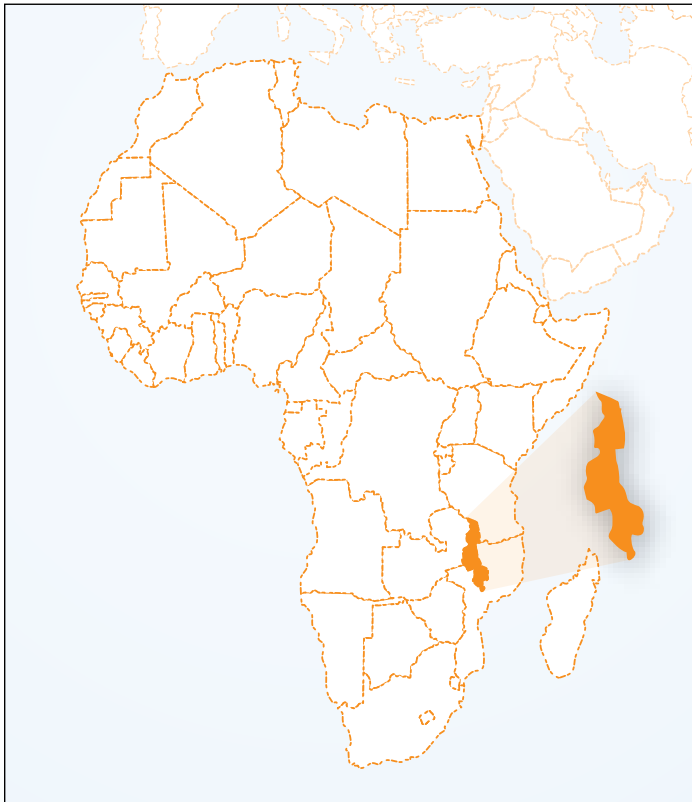


Katie *jumped* off her chair
and disappeared into her room.



A Guide for Parents and Educators

African Heartbeat is a story about transformation. It highlights the positive spiritual and physical changes that occur on both sides of the ocean during the child sponsorship process. The information contained here is designed to help you understand Neema's world before and after sponsorship. We hope you will use this information to help young readers see the whole story. As you read *African Heartbeat*, encourage the children to take a close look at the illustrations. Ask them how the life of a child in America is different from that of a child in Africa. Encourage them to look for changes in Neema's village as the story progresses (see "How Sponsorship Changes the Landscape"). Together, you and your young readers will discover that while children's circumstances may be different, all children dream of a life of hope and meaning.



Neema's World

African Heartbeat takes place in a small country called Malawi. Nearly 15 million people live in an area the size of Pennsylvania. Malawi is a beautiful country with rolling hills and high plateaus. But it is also a country with much poverty and suffering.

One in eight Malawians is living with HIV or AIDS. Nearly 68,000 of those infected die each year. As a result, more than half a million children in Malawi have lost one or both parents to this deadly disease. The lucky ones, like Neema, are taken in by relatives. The less fortunate are left to fend for themselves in what are known as child-headed households. In these situations, children are raising children in an environment of intense poverty.

In Malawi, children help in every aspect of life. Older children take care of their younger siblings, help prepare meals, work in the fields, and collect water. Young children sweep and help gather sticks for firewood. When time allows, they invent games using sticks, rusty tire rims, and balls made from tightly wound plastic bags.

Ninety percent of the people of Malawi live in rural villages. Their huts are made of mud walls, thatched roofs, and dirt floors. They often have to walk several miles to get water from creeks or ponds for cooking, washing, and bathing. This water is usually infected with deadly bacteria and parasites. Diarrhea, caused by bacteria-infected water, is the number one killer of children under the age of 5.

There are two seasons in Malawi: the rainy season and the dry season. The rainy season begins in October and ends in March. These months are hot and exceptionally wet. Dirt roads and paths become mud bowls, and are often impassable. Crops are planted at the beginning of the rainy season and then guarded against marauding animals like baboons and elephants.

Corn is the main crop in Malawi, and cornfields stretch as far as the eye can see. Most meals consist of corn, with a sprinkling of other vegetables such as pumpkin leaves (see pages 11 and 12). To make the leaves edible, the hairy skin is carefully peeled off before the leaves are boiled. Occasionally, a meal also includes fish or meat.

The dry season lasts from April through September. It can get surprisingly cold during these months, even though the sun turns the country into a dry and barren landscape. These are the “hungry months” as food supplies and natural water sources dry up. Education is valued in Malawi, but there are few resources to help in the teaching process. Many rural classrooms consist of nothing more than a circle of rocks placed under the shade of a big tree (see page 4).

Africa is a large continent consisting of **53** countries. Since many people in Africa speak Swahili as a first or second language, all the African characters in *African Heartbeat* were given Swahili names. Each name has significant meaning.

Neema means “grace.”

Tumaini means “hope.”

Zawadi means “gift.”

How Sponsorship Changes the Landscape

Through child sponsorship, World Vision is working to help Malawians improve their present and future circumstances. Take a close look at the illustrations listed below to see how sponsorship makes a difference.

Before Sponsorship		After Sponsorship	
Page	Look for	Page	Look for
4	Dirty, tattered clothes	21	Clean, new clothes
4	Girls sitting on rocks in a typical outdoor classroom	18	New school construction
--	-----	14	Healthy crops as a result of improved farming techniques
11–12	Unsafe watering hole	21	New well with clean, safe water
--	-----	17	Letters and gifts from sponsors that bring joy
--	-----	22	Hope for a brighter future