

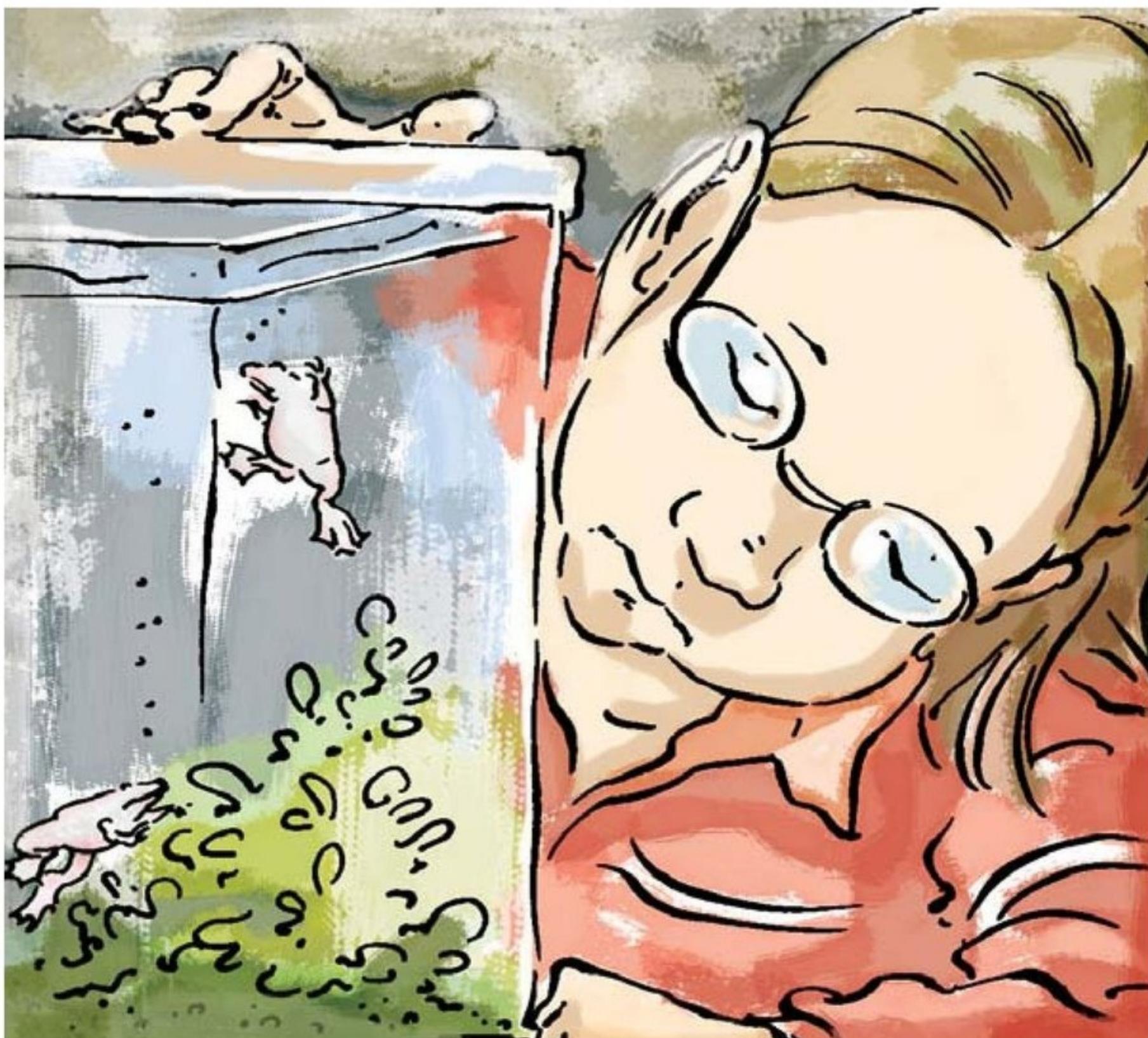
LEVELED BOOK • S

# Losing Grandpa



Written by Kira Freed • Illustrated by Anik McGrory

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## CHAPTER 1

### Where's Mom?

"What are you doing here?" Hannah asked as she walked up the front path to her house. Coming home from school, she saw her Mom's friend Laura standing at the door. Hannah's mom's car was gone. "Where's Mom? She's always here when I get home from school."

"Sweetie, something's happened. Why don't you put down your things and we'll talk."

Hannah rushed upstairs with her backpack and then hurried back downstairs. “What happened?”

Laura began. “Honey, your grandpa got very sick today and had to go to the hospital. Your mom went with him to find out what’s wrong and stay with him for a while.”

“What happened? Is he real sick? Is he going to stay at the hospital?” The questions tumbled out of Hannah’s mouth.

“The doctors aren’t sure what’s wrong with him yet. Your mom promised she’d call soon after you got home from school and let us know if there’s any news.”





Hannah went to the kitchen to get some juice and a peanut butter cookie. As she nibbled on her cookie, she found herself staring into space. The house just didn't feel the same with Grandpa missing. He had lived with Hannah and her mom ever since Hannah was two. That was eight years ago, and he was as much a part of her life as her mom was.



Hannah and her grandpa were good friends. When she was younger, he used to take her for walks around the neighborhood. He had to walk slowly because he had arthritis in his knees. Walking slowly was fine with Hannah because Grandpa had very long legs, and even with his arthritis she had trouble keeping up with him.

As they walked, Grandpa would make Hannah laugh by making up silly stories about the people who lived in each of the houses. “Those people in that gray house over there, they have one hundred basset hounds. All day they take pictures of themselves with their dogs’ ears draped around their heads.” Hannah would giggle, imagining people with long, sleek dog ears for hair.



“And that yellow house on the corner—the people who live there think they can fly. Every night after the sun goes down, they open their second-story windows, stand in the moonlight, twirl their arms, and holler for all the world to hear, ‘We’re getting ready to take off—just give us a moment to get our wings warmed up!’” Hannah thought Grandpa was the silliest person on earth. And in truth, he probably was.

But the thing Hannah loved the most about her grandpa was how he made up different personalities for himself. One day he would be Il Baconi, the Italian swashbuckler. On another day, he would be Harry the Horrible, delighting in zany, ghoulish pranks. Each character had its own unique accent, and sometimes it seemed as if the real Grandpa disappeared and the character took over completely. Hannah was never frightened by his antics—she knew he would eventually come back to himself because he always did. Over the years, they did comedy acts that made them both roar with laughter. Hannah's mom didn't always understand what was so silly, but that never mattered, not to Hannah and her special buddy.





## CHAPTER 2

### Talking with Mom

Hannah was snapped back from her daydream by the sound of the phone ringing. “It’s Mom! I know it is!” she shouted to Laura as she ran to answer the phone.

“Hello, Mom? Is that you?”

“Yes, Hannah Banana, it’s me,” she heard her mom say. “Hannah Banana” had been her mom’s special name for Hannah ever since her birth.

"What happened to Grandpa? Is he going to be okay?"

"Well, Banana, Grandpa got real sick this afternoon. He was walking to the bathroom when he suddenly fell down. He lost consciousness—that means I couldn't wake him up. I called 9-1-1. The paramedics came right away and took him to the hospital, and I went along. I asked Laura to stay there so you wouldn't come home to an empty house."

"But what's happening with Grandpa? Does he have to stay at the hospital?" Hannah asked impatiently.

Her mom began, with hesitation. "The doctors did some tests on Grandpa, and they found out that he had a stroke. Do you know what that is?"

"I've heard of it before, but I don't really know what it is."

Hannah's mom continued, "The blood supply to Grandpa's brain got blocked, and his brain didn't get the oxygen it needed."



"Without oxygen, the brain gets damaged. That's a pretty serious thing, especially for an older person whose body takes longer to heal."

Hannah burst into tears. "Is Grandpa going to die? I don't want him to die!" she blurted out through her sobs.

Hannah's mom began to cry, too. "Sweetie, I don't want him to die, either. We'll just have to hope for the best and send him lots of love."

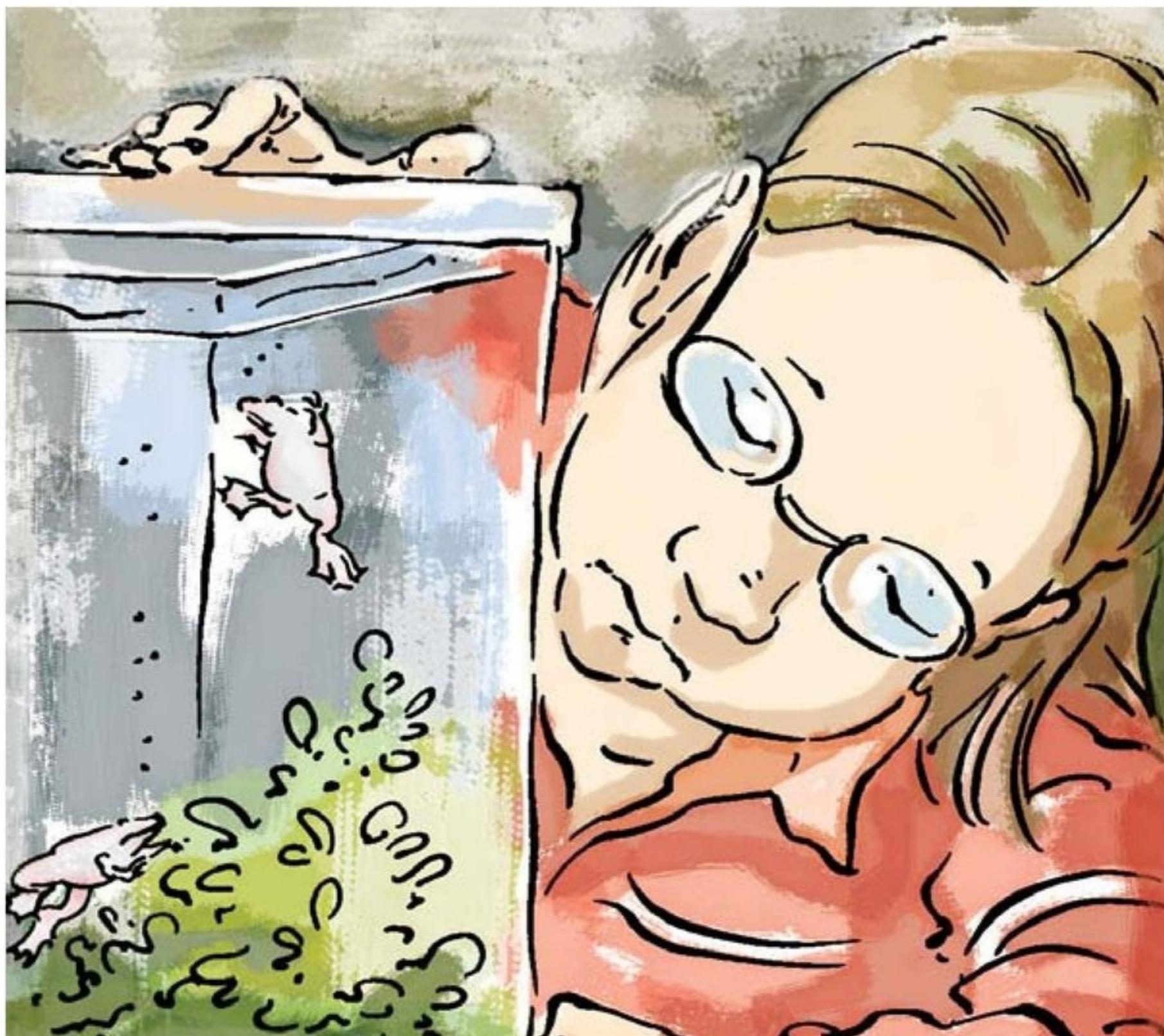
"Okay," Hannah said quietly. "When will you be home, Mom?"

"I need to wait here at the hospital to talk with one of Grandpa's doctors. They're going to keep Grandpa here for a while, and I need to find out what their plans are for him. I don't think I'll be home until after you're in bed. Laura will give you dinner and help you with your homework. I'll see you in the morning. Will you be okay?"

"I guess so, Mom. I'm just sad. Sad and scared."

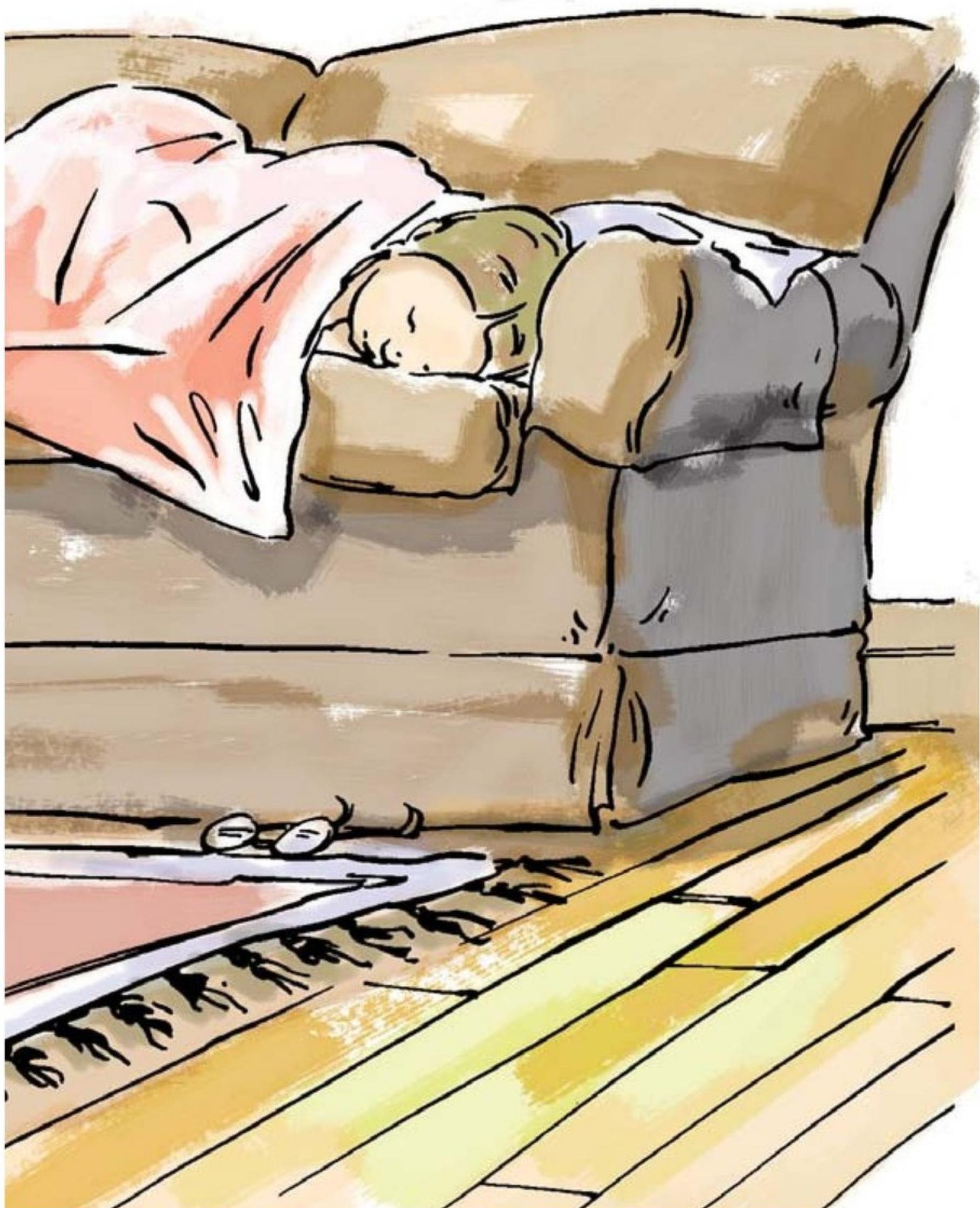
"I know, Banana. Me, too. Here's a real big phone hug. Mmmmm! I'll see you soon."

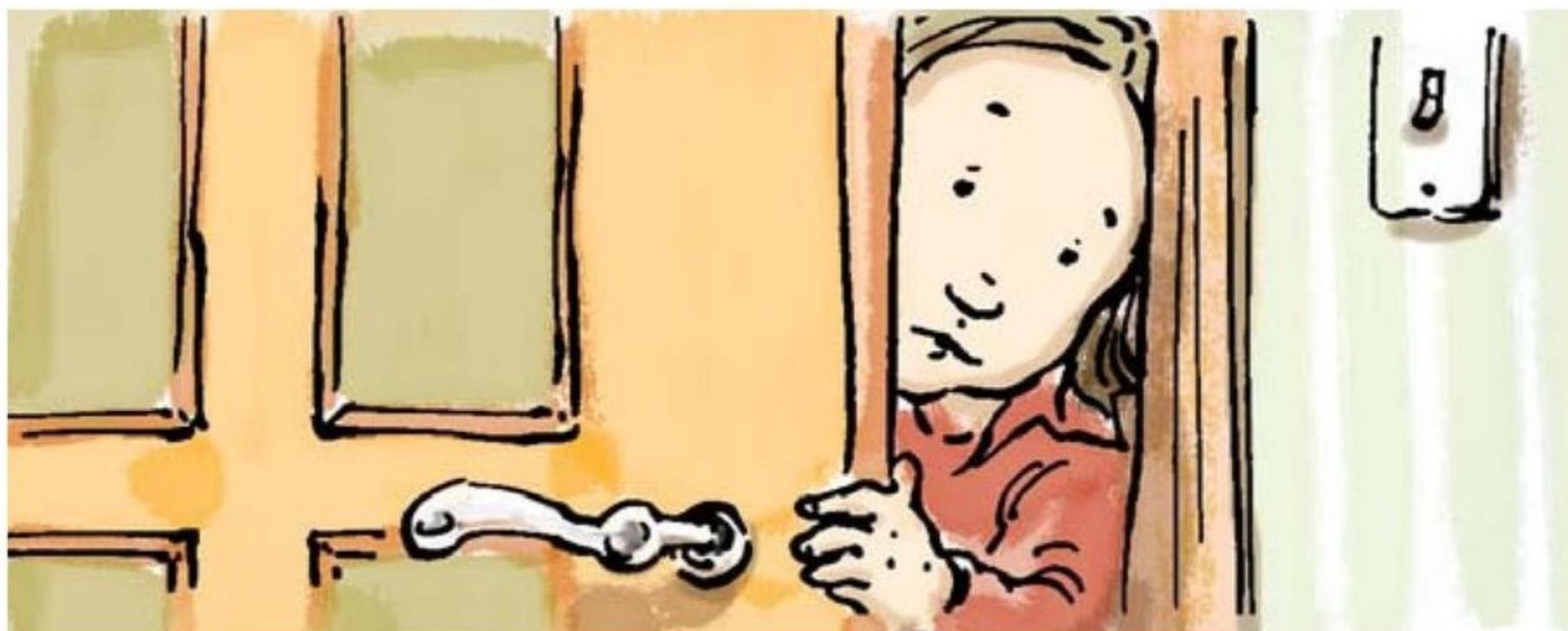
Hannah hung up the phone and flopped into a chair. Laura tried to comfort her, but it was clear that Hannah just wanted to be left alone. After a while she went up to her room and lay on her bed. She looked at the picture on her nightstand of Grandpa and herself feeding seagulls. Their time together at the beach the year before was one of her most special memories. She started crying when she thought of never getting to play with him again.



Hannah went over to her albino clawed frog tank and watched her frogs drift lazily underwater. She had had many frogs over the years, and some of them had died. She knew about death when it came to pets, and she knew that people died as well. Her best friend's mom had died in a car accident two years earlier. Hannah had tried to help her friend with the sadness, but it was just too big. And the thought of losing Grandpa was so much bigger even than that.

Hannah decided to put away the thought. She ate a quick dinner of leftover pizza, did the little bit of math homework she had, and spent the rest of the evening watching television. She fell asleep on the couch, and Laura covered her with a blanket and let her sleep.





## CHAPTER 3

### Morning Comes

The bright morning light hit Hannah's face just after six o'clock. She didn't need to be up yet, but the living room was much lighter than her bedroom, and she couldn't go back to sleep once the light awakened her. She drifted lazily in and out of sleep for ten minutes, and then she remembered: Grandpa's very sick, and Mom came home late last night. Hannah sat up suddenly and darted for her mom's bedroom.

Her mom was awake, too, thinking about Grandpa. When Hannah peeked in the bedroom door, her mom said, "Come on in, Banana-girl. Why don't you crawl in bed with me for a little while and we'll have some snuggle time?"

That sounded really good to Hannah. She crawled in beside her mom and nestled into her mom's morning warmth. She savored a few moments of closeness with her mom before asking the question most on her mind. "How's Grandpa doing?"

"Well, Sweetie, I'm afraid the news isn't so good. They did a lot of tests on him and determined that he had a pretty serious stroke. He's in a coma now, which is kind of like a very deep sleep. It's what sometimes happens when a person has been through something traumatic."

"Is he going to wake up?" Hannah asked hesitantly.



Her mom took her time in answering. She was torn between wanting to protect her daughter from suffering and wanting to help her daughter learn how to face difficult things in life head-on. Finally she took a deep breath and said, “The doctors don’t know if he’s going to wake up, but it doesn’t look good.” Tears began spilling down her cheeks. When Hannah saw her mom crying, she felt more freedom to feel her own sadness. She held tight to her mom and let the sadness fill her up.

Hannah’s mom held her close and let her cry for several minutes. When she sensed that Hannah was calmer, she said, “Hannah Banana, how about if you stay home from school today and we go visit Grandpa in the hospital? Last night I told the doctor about how close you and Grandpa are, and he gave permission for you to come to the hospital with me. They usually don’t allow children into the intensive care unit, but they made an exception for you. We can sit with Grandpa for a while and talk to him.”

“But he’s in a coma—he won’t be able to hear us.”

“Well, a lot of doctors believe that some people in comas can hear what is said to them. And even if Grandpa can’t hear with his ears, I’m sure he can hear with his heart. And I think it will be good for you and me, too. We can tell him how much we love him and talk about all the things we’ve enjoyed doing with him over the years. Maybe talking with him will help us feel closer to him.”

“Does Grandpa look scary?”

“He pretty much just looks as though he’s sleeping. A little different, but he’s still your wonderful Grandpa who loves you. So what do you say, should we have some breakfast and go visit him?”

“Yeah, let’s go see him.”



## CHAPTER 4

### To the Hospital

After a quick breakfast, Hannah and her mom got dressed and drove to the hospital. They asked at the front desk where to find Grandpa and then took the elevator up to the eighth floor. Hannah had never been to a hospital before and didn't like the smell of medicine that seemed to fill the air. She peeked in a few rooms as they walked down the hall and saw patients hooked up to all sorts of machines, surrounded by people with worried looks on their faces. This made her even more eager to get to Grandpa's room fast.

When they got to Room 824, Hannah hesitated. She was afraid to see her beloved Grandpa so sick, yet she felt a strong yearning to be close to him. She held back for a moment, taking in the reality of him being in a coma, and then rushed to his side. “Is it okay to hold his hand, Mom?”

“Sure, Sweetie. Just be careful that you don’t bump any tubes or equipment.”

Hannah took his big, square hand in hers and felt the familiar warmth that had given her such comfort over the years. “Hi, Grandpa,” she whispered. “It’s Hannah. I came to visit you and tell you that I love you and want you to get better.”

Hannah’s mom stood back, letting Hannah have private time with Grandpa. She was so grateful that the two of them had developed such a close relationship. It had helped to make up for the fact that Hannah’s dad had left soon after Hannah was born. After Grandpa came to live with them, their lives seemed to grow calmer with his presence.



"Hannah, do you want to tell Grandpa what you love about him?"

"Sure. Grandpa, I love your fuzzy white beard that you always insist is black. And I love all those people you pretend to be and the accents you make up, and the stories you invent about people you don't know. And you make the best scrambled eggs in the world. And I love how you can fix everything that gets broken. But my very favorite thing is when we go walking in the woods and you teach me about rivers and birds and flowers and stars and moons."

Tears came to Hannah's eyes as she remembered all the wonderful times she had had with Grandpa. "Please don't die. I love you so, so much." She sat quietly for several moments, just holding his hand.

When Hannah was finished, she got up and said, "Mom, why don't you talk to him now?" Hannah went around to the other side of the bed and held Grandpa's other hand while her mom talked to him. After a few moments, her mom got up and went to find Grandpa's doctor to ask some questions. While she was gone, Hannah sat holding and stroking Grandpa's hand. Even though he couldn't talk, just touching him was a comfort to Hannah. She knew she might not be able to for much longer, so she soaked up the time with him while she could.

When Hannah's mom returned, she said, "Okay, Banana, it's time for us to go. Say goodbye to Grandpa for now."

Hannah leaned over and kissed Grandpa on the forehead. "See you later, Il Baconi. Please get better. I love you."



## CHAPTER 5

### The Phone Call

Later that afternoon, Hannah and her mom were looking over the vegetables in their garden when the phone rang. Hannah's mom went inside to answer it. She was gone long enough that Hannah began to wonder what was going on. She went inside and found her mom sitting on the couch with tears streaming down her face.

"That was a call from the hospital, Banana," Hannah's mom said through her tears. "Come here and sit with me, Sweetie."

"What happened, Mom?" Hannah didn't want to hear, but she couldn't help but ask.

“Grandpa’s heartbeat became irregular a little while ago, and some doctors and nurses rushed in to try to help him. They did everything they could . . .” Hannah’s mom paused to take a deep breath and calm herself for what came next. “But they couldn’t save him. Grandpa died.”

Hannah burst into tears, and the two of them just sat and cried for a long time, holding onto each other. Hannah wasn’t thinking about anything—her mind just went blank, and her tears were a huge river roaring through her heart.

After a long time and many tears, Hannah’s mom said, “I’m sure glad we got to see him this morning.”

“Yeah—me, too,” Hannah said. “Do you think he could hear us talking to him?”

“Yes, Banana, I do. I don’t know what happens to people after they die, but I do know that it’s important for them to feel loved at the end of their lives. I’m sure that Grandpa felt deeply loved by both of us.”



The next few days were a whirlwind of relatives and friends bringing food and keeping Hannah and her mom company. Laura stayed at their house most of the time, helping Hannah's mom make decisions about the funeral and just being there for comfort and support.

Hannah spent a lot of time in her room, drawing or talking to her frogs. She wanted to be alone much of the time, and her mom knew that was okay. She knew Hannah needed time to feel her feelings and to not always be distracted from that. She trusted that Hannah would heal over time from this deep sadness, although there would always be an emptiness inside her from losing her sweet Grandpa.

When the time came for the funeral, Hannah didn't want to go. She didn't want to be reminded yet again that he had died. Her mom understood that Hannah was just very, very sad, but she knew that it was important for Hannah to go. The funeral was an opportunity for Hannah to say goodbye to him and to feel supported by other people who had also loved him.

Hannah snuggled up to her mom during the funeral and listened while many family members and friends took turns talking about what Grandpa had meant to them. Hannah never before thought about the rest of Grandpa's life—she had only thought about *her* relationship with him. Suddenly she felt part of a great circle of people who all loved him, and she didn't feel so alone in her sadness.



## CHAPTER 6

### Starting to Heal

Two weeks after the funeral, Hannah and her mom went to a plant nursery and bought a small Japanese maple, which had been Grandpa's favorite kind of tree. They decided to plant it in the backyard in a spot where they could see it from the window of the family room. While they were planting it, they talked about what a wonderful man Grandpa had been and how blessed they were to have so much special time with him.

After the tree was in the ground, Hannah petted it gently and said to her mom, "Now whenever I look at this tree, it'll remind me of Grandpa. It'll almost be like he's still with us."

Hannah's mom felt a warm glow inside. She knew in her heart that Grandpa would indeed always be with them. When you love someone deeply, the love stays with you forever.



**Author's Note:**

This book is dedicated to Hannah Silverberg and to the memory of Lou Silverberg,  
1916–1991.

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