Supercurl

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Dedicated to my dearest sister, Andreea.
- Irina

Every Sunday, after Emma and Grandma went to St. Brendan's Church. Afterwards, they took a long walk through Maisonneuve park, discussing what had been taught.

Father Paul, the bearded priest, encouraged the children to pe rform one act of kindness.

Emma had the most voluptuous hair. Her ringlets of curls hung heavy on her small head. But Emma loved her hair.

She loved that she didn't need to brush it every morning. She loved how it made her look like a mermaid underwater. But most of all she loved it because it made her special.

Emma gripped the chains of the swing tightly, her knees folding and extending. The seat's antique charm hadn't changed since she was little.

"Excuse me, how much longer will you be?"

Emma looked at the little girl in front of her. She seemed about two years younger than Emma. Her smile so wide and excited, her pale skin dotted with kisses from the sun. But the most obvious feature dancing against the movement of the wind, blending in with the reds of the fallen leaves, was her hair.

Her locks and locks of beautiful hair.

"Emma, let the little girl have a turn," her grandmother said sternly but as always softly.

Without a word, still staring in admiration, Emma got off the swing as Red hopped on, her scent like the slow toasting of a cinnamon bun.

Every few minutes, they switched places. At first, Emma was shy, but Red had a way of making her feel comfortable. It reminded Emma of the feeling she used to have with Mother.

Emma never went as high on the swing as Red did. When Emma saw the ground getting too far away from her, she was scared and would stretch her foot onto the sand to stop herself .

But Red went higher, she said that she could see the tops of the trees, the messiest bird nests, and that if she stuck her hand out, she felt as if she could reach the softest cloud.

It was Emma's turn to swing. Emma felt a push, she felt her curls rise from her back and form a mane. She felt another push, followed by another and another. She was so involved with the beautiful autumn leaves, she forgot that she was scared.

When she got off the swing, she looked at Red, grateful.

The week after, Emma hoped to see Red again.
She raced to her swing. There was a young child with slouched
shoulders and a hoodie that covered their head. Emma wanted
to try swinging higher this time.
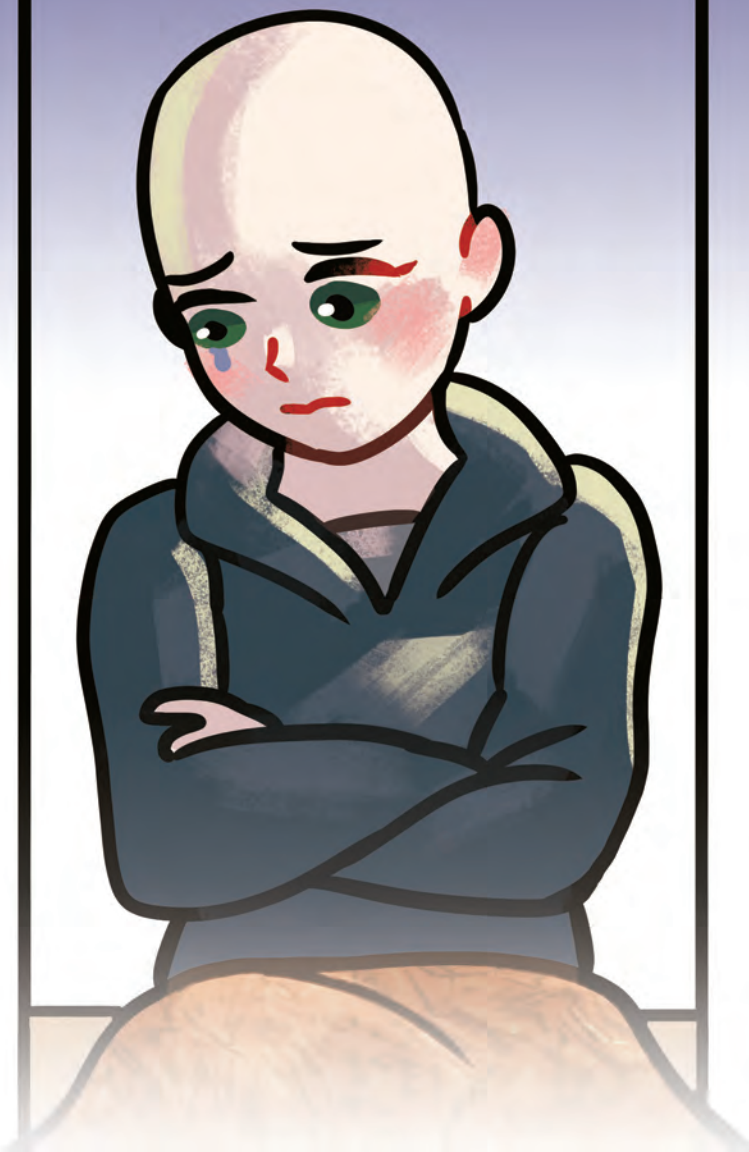
"Excuse me-" Emma started.

Familiar green eyes met hers. Her once map of freckles had now disappeared. She slowly took off her hoodie.

Red was no longer red.

Emma looked at Red in confusion. Last time Emma had seen her, she felt that she had finally met someone with hair that was as special as hers. But now, she didn't know how to react. She felt hurt in some way.

"What happened to your hair, Red?"

Emma now noticed she wore a hospital gown under her hoodie; it looked similar to the one Mother had worn.

"It's gone. I'm sick, Emma. And today, I had to give away my hair. I don't feel like me anymore."

Emma couldn't imagine not having her curly hair. Everywhere she went people stopped her to tell her how special it was.

Emma spent all night wondering what she could do to help Red.
She wanted her friend to feel special again.

She then remembered that when Mother was sick, someone had donated their
own hair. She remembered the look on Mother's face, the purity, the joy
of someone else making such a gesture. She then thought about the act of
kindness that she needed to perform.

But how would Emma look without hair? What would grandma think?
Would people think that she was still special?

She knew what she had to do. She told herself it would be okay.
And she couldn't wait to surprise Red with the gift of a new set of
hair. Even though it wasn't vibrant or the colour of strawberries, she
hoped that it was enough to show she cared.

After hours upon hours of convincing Grandma that hair
did in fact grow back, together they went to the hairdresser.

Chop,
chop,
chop.

ZZZZZZZ...
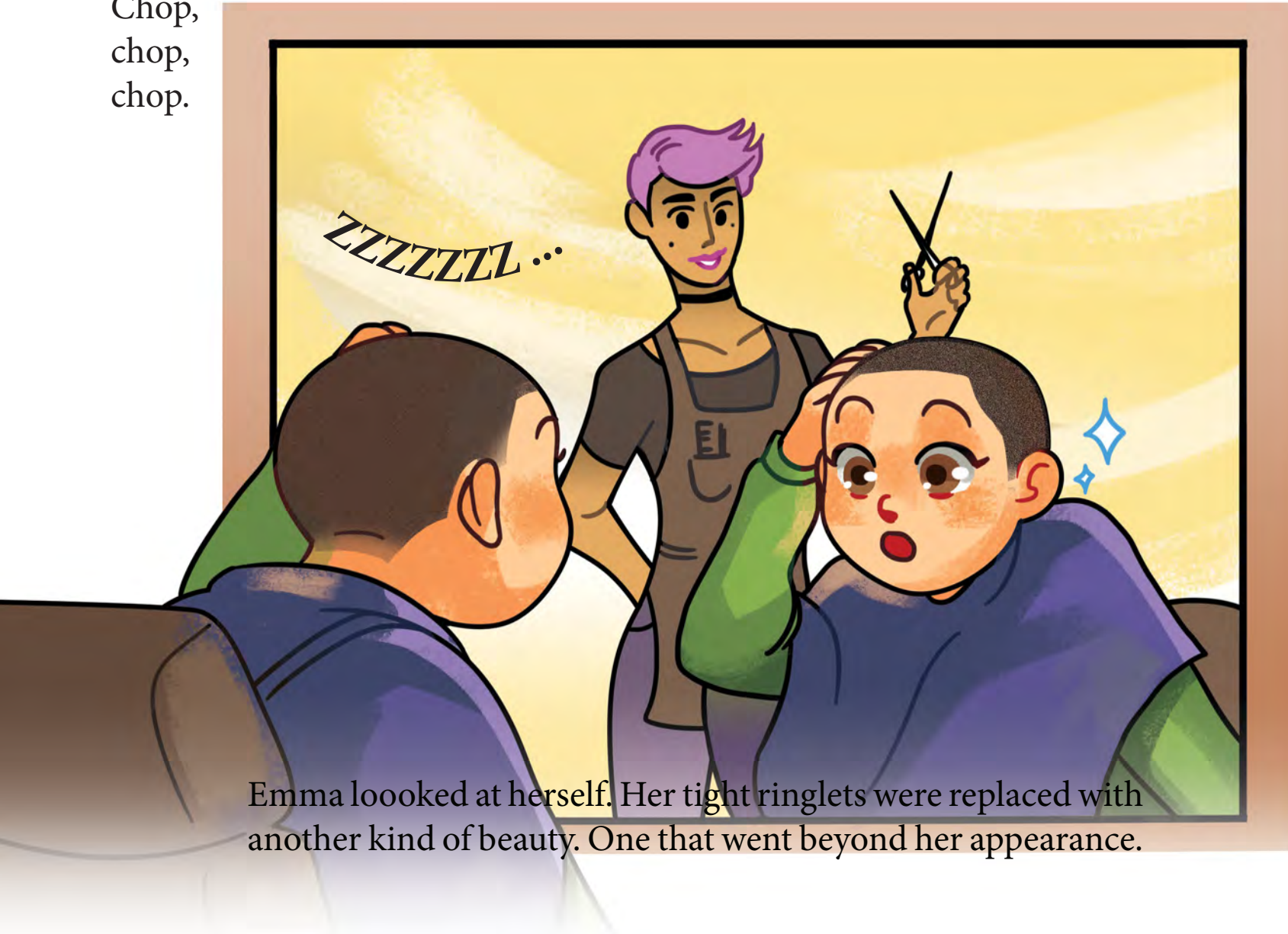
Emma loooked at herself. Her tight ringlets were replaced with
another kind of beauty. One that went beyond her appearance.

Her feet harshly hit the gravel. With every leap towards the swing,
she smiled, excited to bring her hair to Red.

But Red wasn't there.
"Can we check the hospital grandma?"
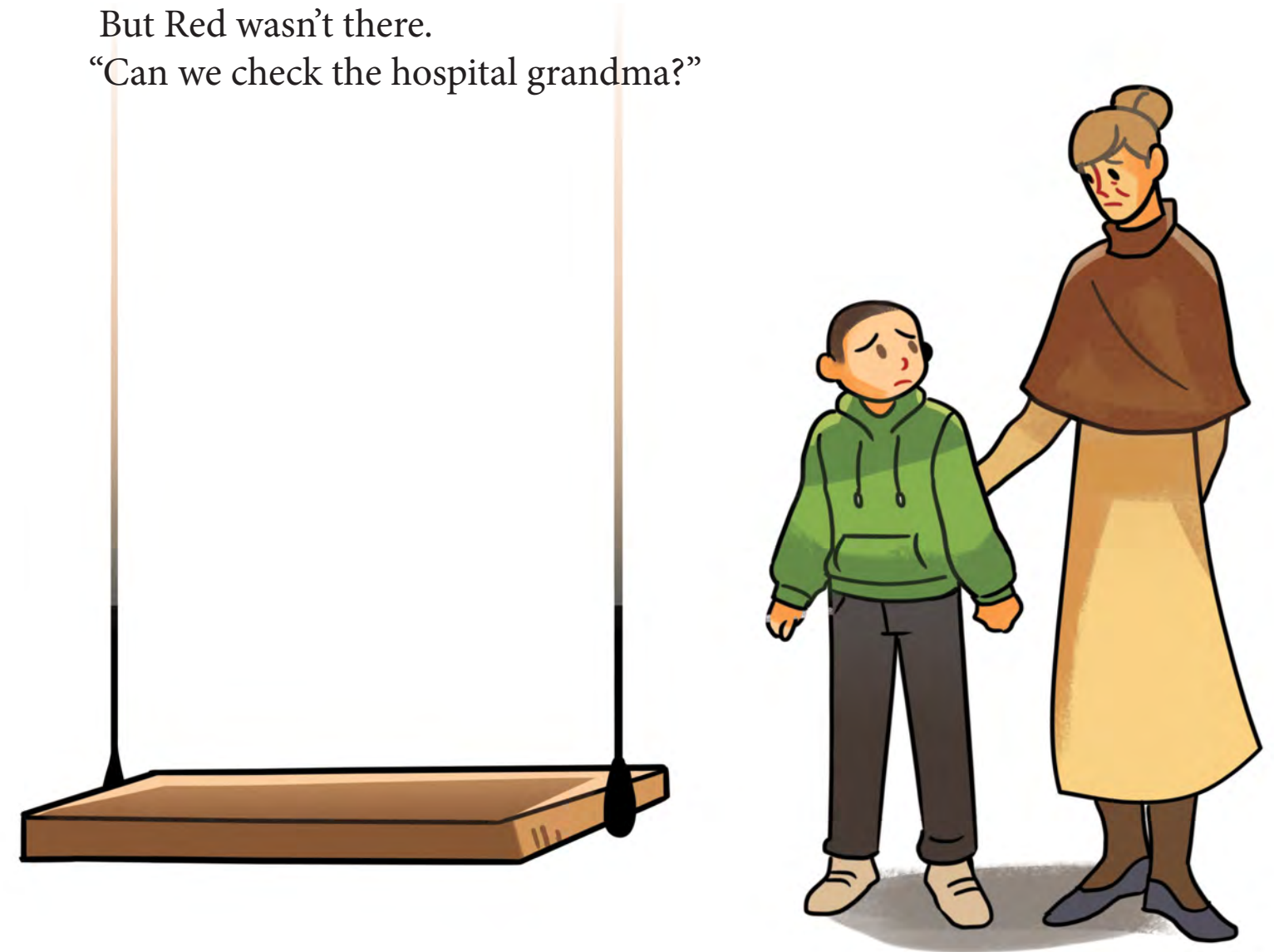
The whole bus ride, Emma felt worried, a familiar worry. Her cries were so
soft yet screamed so loud. Her heart ripped through her shirt, begging her to
take a few deep breaths.

She raced through the hospital, eager to see if Red was okay.
"Floor 2, Room 7" the nurse said with a warm smile.
Emma thought the nurse's hat looked like a little boat.

She felt like it was a game of tag between her and Red. The doors swung
open as she finally saw Red, running her hand through Emma's locks of hair.
A waterfall of tears swam down Red's cheeks.

It seemed that Emma and Red stepped over every crunchy leaf in Maisonneuve park.

A clearwing butterfly flew through the window and landed on Emma's shoulder. With every flap released tickles of kisses. She looked up as the gentle wings seesawed through the sky and she now knew that her mother was proud.
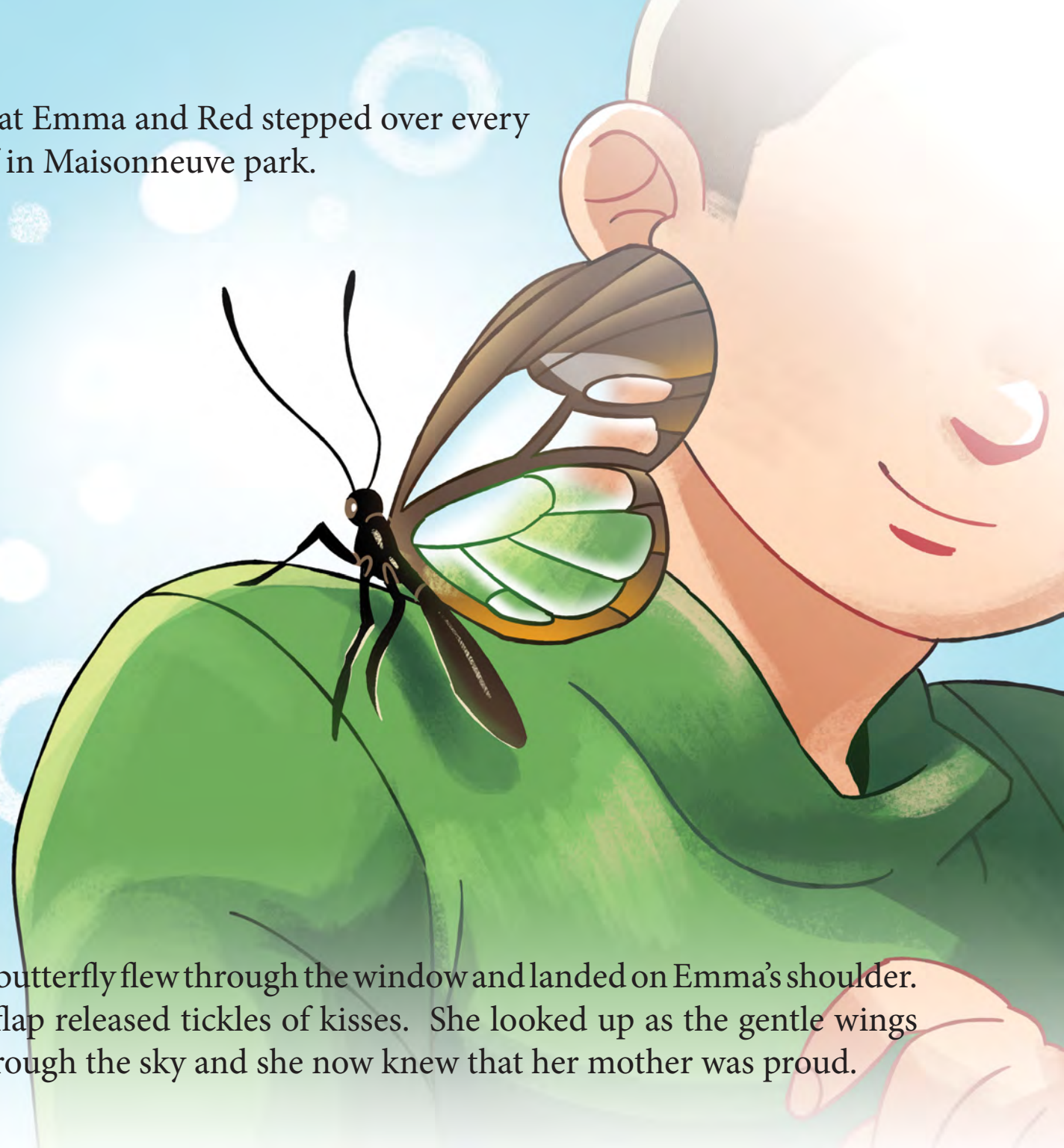
Emma has always believed that her curly hair is what makes her special. But a new friend helpsher untangle the truth.