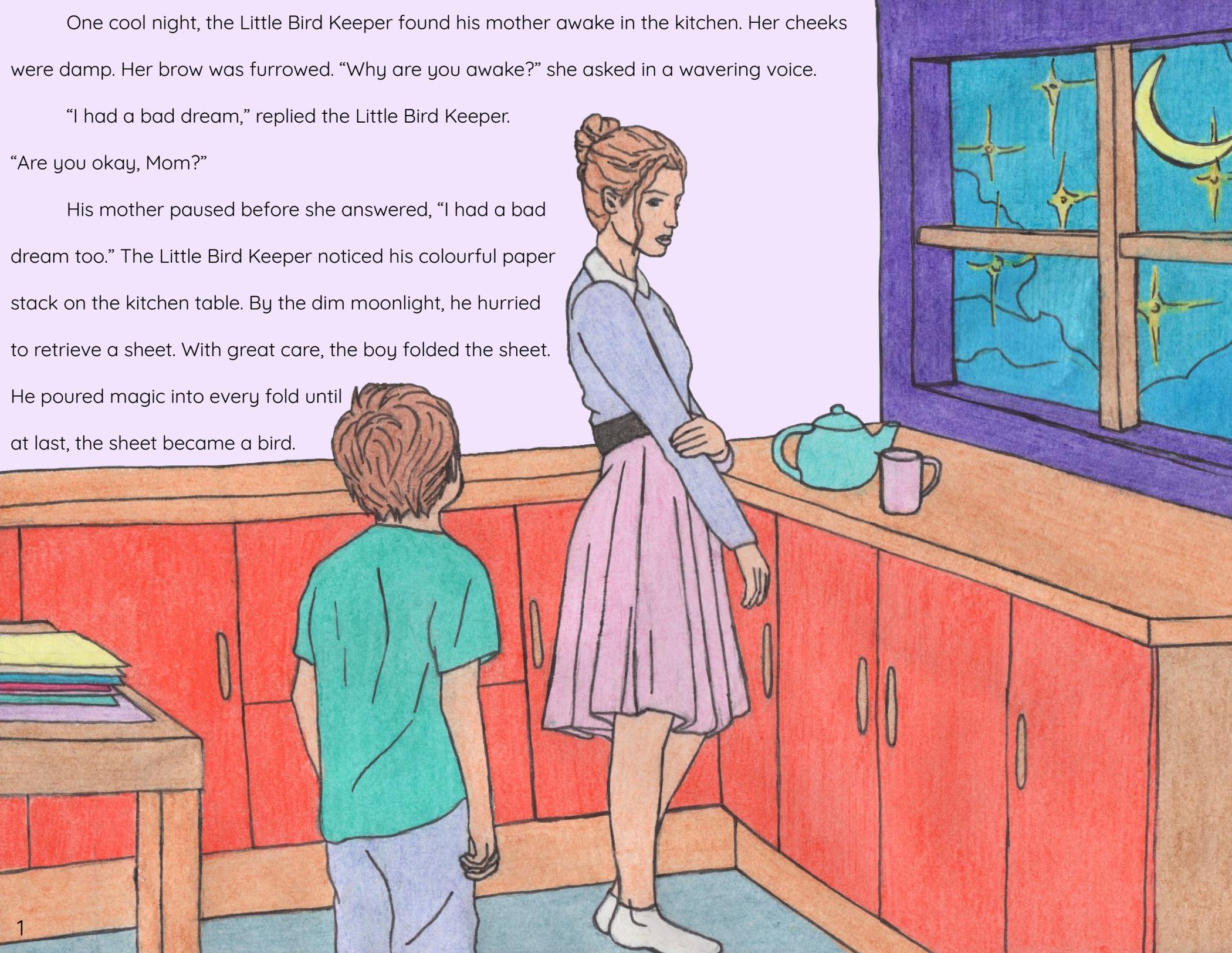


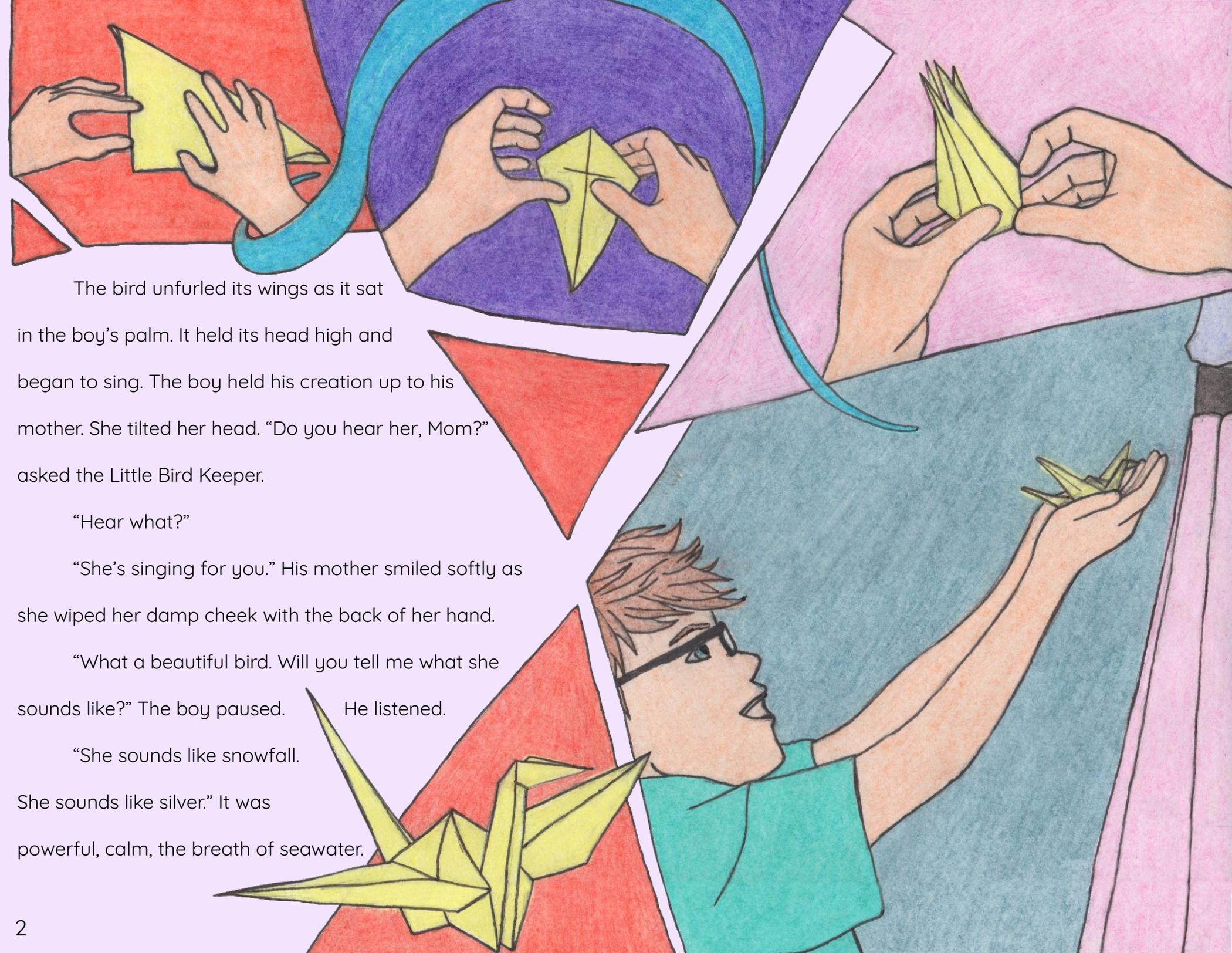
One cool night, the Little Bird Keeper found his mother awake in the kitchen. Her cheeks were damp. Her brow was furrowed. "Why are you awake?" she asked in a wavering voice.

"I had a bad dream," replied the Little Bird Keeper.

"Are you okay, Mom?"

His mother paused before she answered, "I had a bad dream too." The Little Bird Keeper noticed his colourful paper stack on the kitchen table. By the dim moonlight, he hurried to retrieve a sheet. With great care, the boy folded the sheet. He poured magic into every fold until at last, the sheet became a bird.





The bird unfurled its wings as it sat in the boy's palm. It held its head high and began to sing. The boy held his creation up to his mother. She tilted her head. "Do you hear her, Mom?" asked the Little Bird Keeper.

"Hear what?"

"She's singing for you." His mother smiled softly as she wiped her damp cheek with the back of her hand.

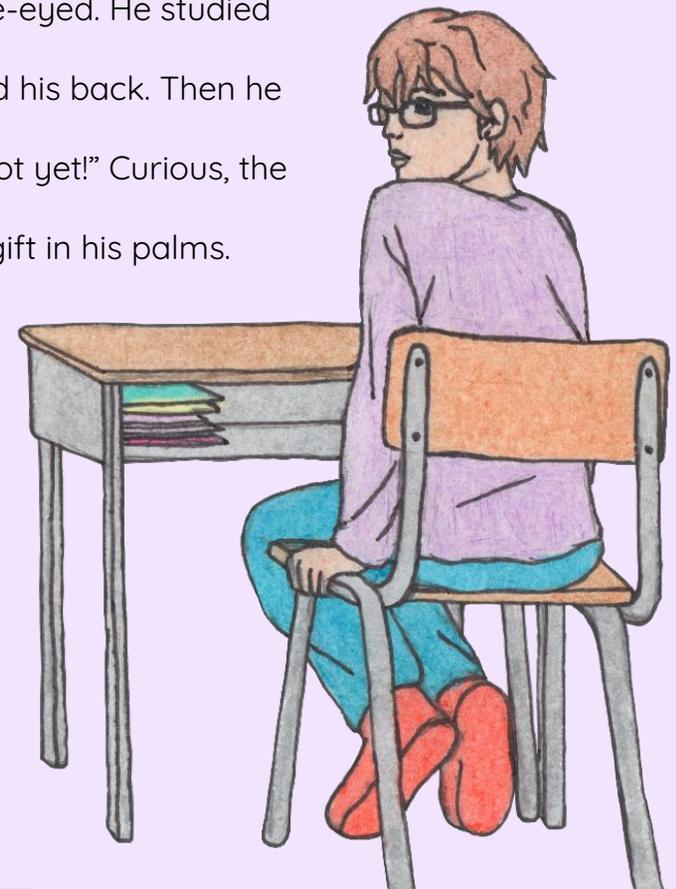
"What a beautiful bird. Will you tell me what she sounds like?" The boy paused. He listened.

"She sounds like snowfall. She sounds like silver." It was powerful, calm, the breath of seawater.

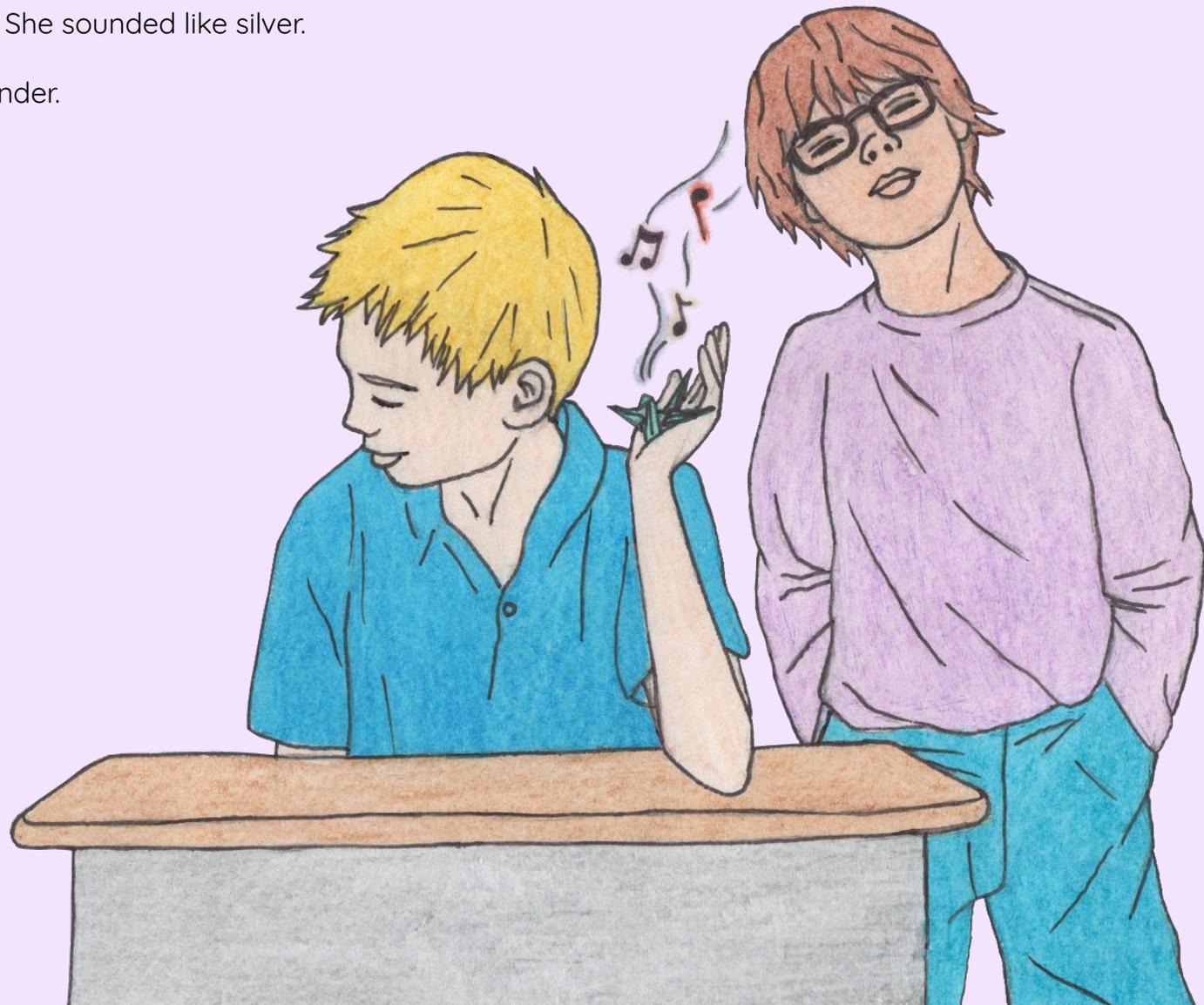
*The Little Bird Keeper* grew. He went to school and shared his gift with friends. The other students loved to watch the Little Bird Keeper's magic. They could hear the songs that made them smile.

A new student joined the class one day and sat alone. The Little Bird Keeper noticed that his eyes always turned toward the ground. Intrigued, the Little Bird Keeper folded a colourful sheet. He held his magical creation behind his back and approached the new student's desk.

"Hello!" he said. The new student looked him in the eye. "I have a gift. Hold out your hands, please!" The new boy hesitated, wide-eyed. He studied the Little Bird Keeper and wondered what might be behind his back. Then he heard a gentle twitter. "Shh!" said the Little Bird Keeper. "Not yet!" Curious, the boy held out his hands. The Little Bird Keeper placed the gift in his palms.



“For me?” asked the new boy. The bird, lovingly and carefully folded from beak to wings, heard its cue and began to sing. The new boy looked up with a friendly smile. “Thank you.” The boy and his friend listened closely together. She sounded like snowfall. She sounded like silver. It embodied the pride of distant thunder.



*The Little Bird Keeper* grew. His friends now dreamed of growing older still. At lunch one day, they shared their frustrations about not being taken seriously by adults. They talked over open lunch boxes. "I hate being told I'll understand when I'm older!" explained a classmate. "I know things! I know I can understand lots more too."

"Once we're adults," replied another, "we can do anything we want." The Little Bird Keeper listened quietly as he finished the last bite of an apple. He recalled the night he'd found his mother in the kitchen and no longer felt hungry. He closed his lunch box. As the discussion went on, he passed the time carefully folding colourful paper.

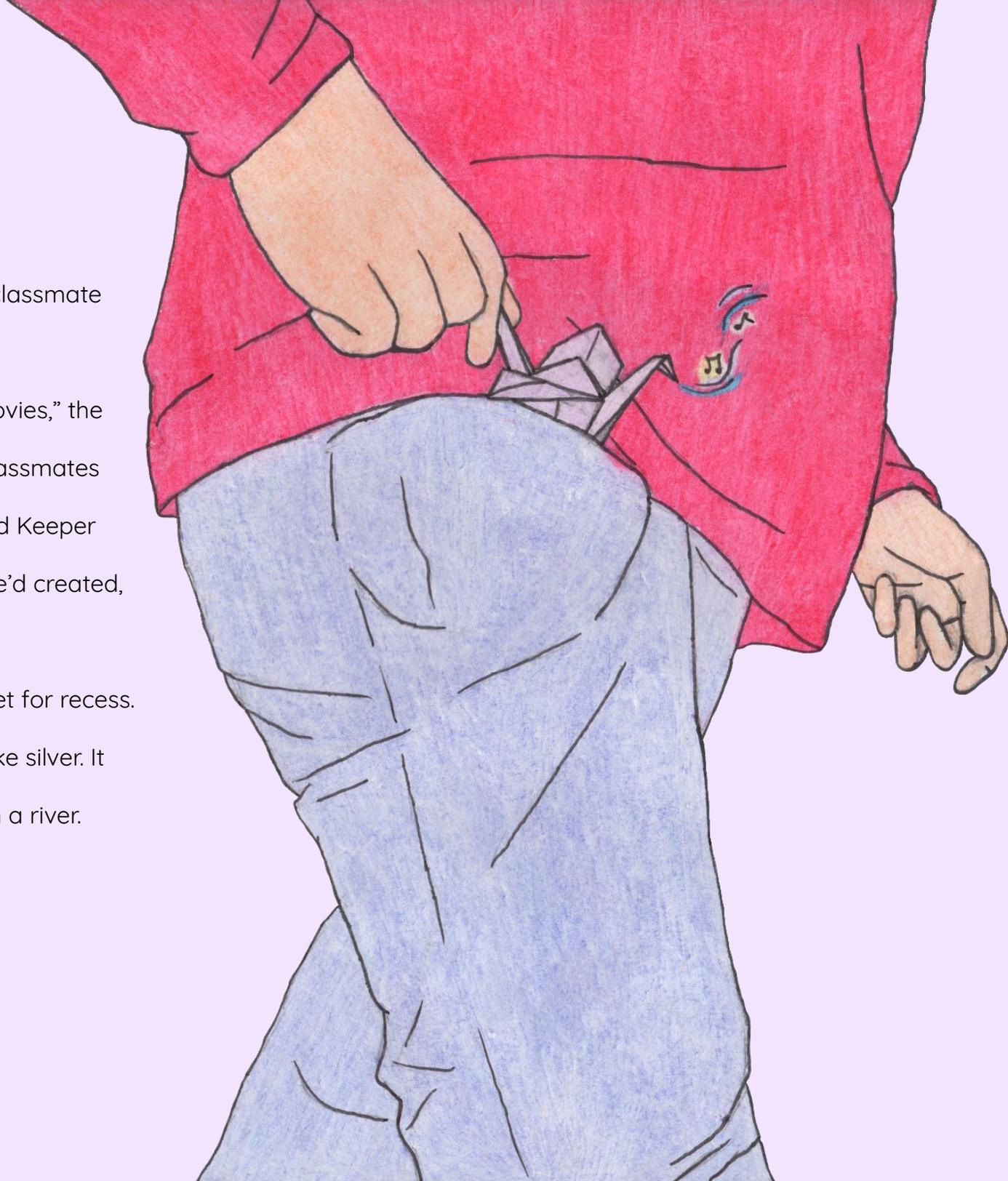
"My dad says I'm mature," the Little Bird Keeper's friend said and sat taller with his head held high.



“Really? You’re so lucky!” replied a classmate with a huff. “I want that.”

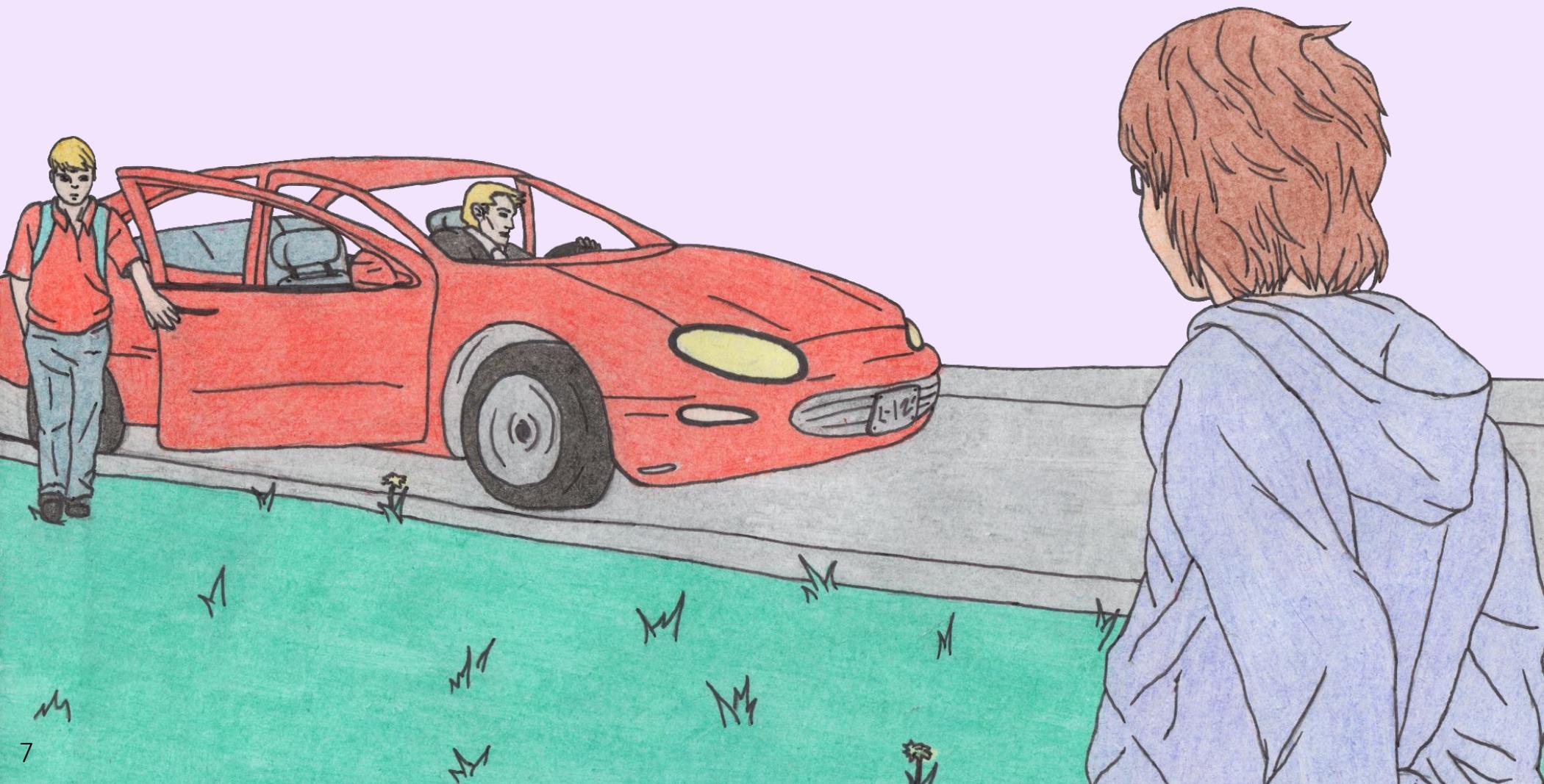
“He doesn’t care if I watch scary movies,” the Little Bird Keeper’s friend continued. As classmates ooded and awed at the friend, the Little Bird Keeper finished. He considered sharing the bird he’d created, but this time it didn’t feel right somehow.

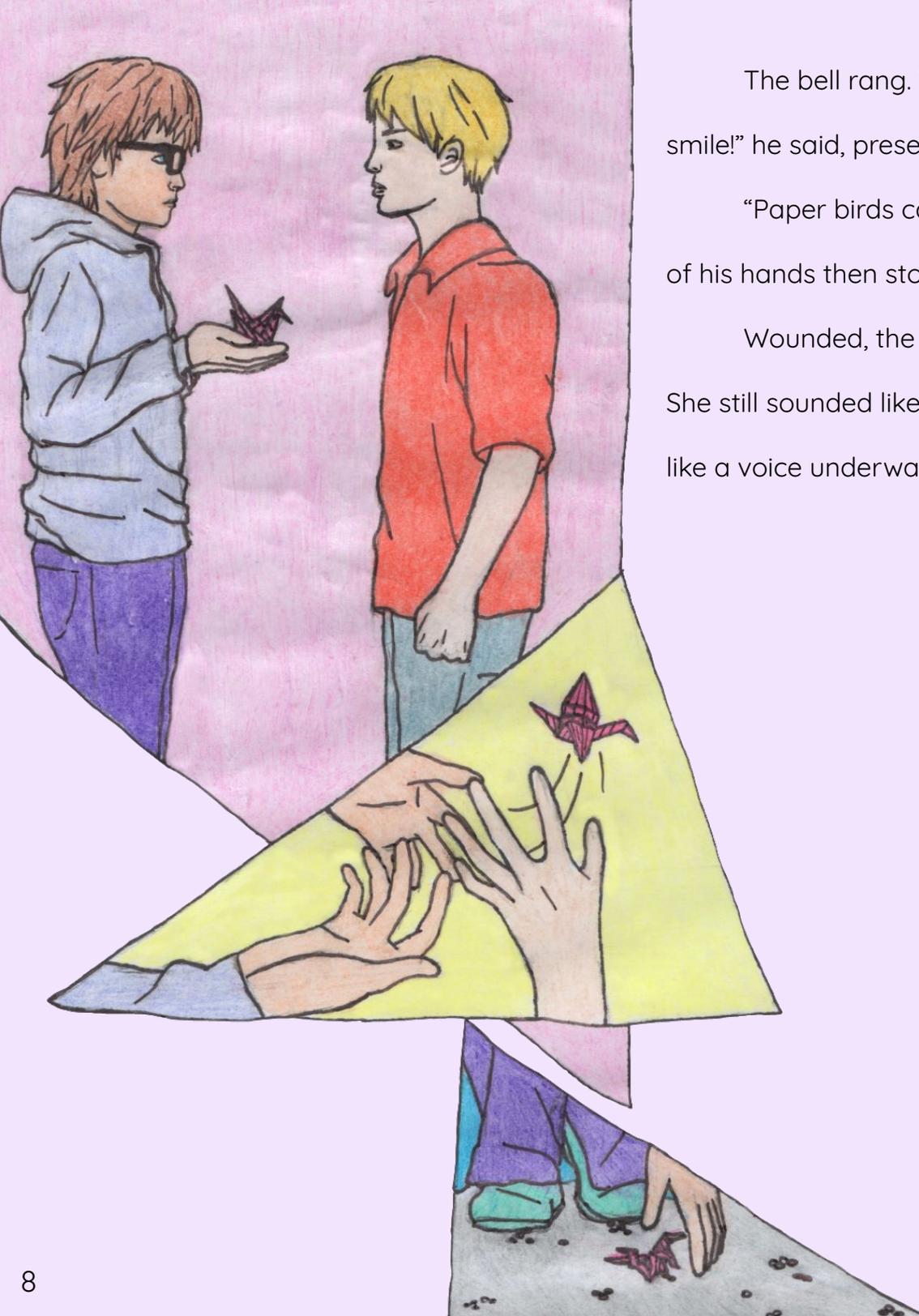
The boy placed the bird in his pocket for recess. She sounded like snowfall. She sounded like silver. It was light as ripples from rocks skipped on a river.



*The Little Bird Keeper* grew. Binders replaced his colourful paper. One morning, he waited for his friend in the schoolyard. He grinned as the car arrived, but something seemed different that morning. Through the car window, he could see his friend's scowling father rant, but he couldn't hear the words. The Little Bird Keeper's grin faded, matching his friend's frown. The friend's shoulders were heavy as he stepped out of the father's car.

Both boys quietly entered class and greeted their classmates. They readied pencils and opened binders. Then the Little Bird Keeper had an idea. He retrieved a lined sheet of paper from his binder and coloured it with highlighter. Carefully, he began to fold. He poured magic into his creation until it unfurled its wings. The Little Bird Keeper asked his bird to wait for recess to sing.





The bell rang. The Little Bird Keeper ran to his friend. “To make you smile!” he said, presenting the bird. His friend scowled.

“Paper birds can’t really sing. Grow up!” he shouted as he hit the bird out of his hands then stormed off.

Wounded, the boy retrieved his bent and broken bird from the concrete. She still sounded like snowfall. She still sounded like silver. The song was now like a voice underwater.



*The Little Bird Keeper* grew. He barely had time for birds anymore. One spring afternoon, the Little Bird Keeper's mother asked him to gather up his old clothes that no longer fit. He was growing fast and tall like an August sunflower. His mother said his old clothes were to be donated, so other children could wear them. The Little Bird Keeper searched through his closet and dresser.

It was a funny feeling to sort through clothes. What had once fit perfectly was now too tight. The Little Bird Keeper wondered how he could grow so big and not even pause to notice. He was glad other children could use his colourful shirts, but still, it felt strange to know he would not see them again.





He removed an old raincoat from its hanger. As he began to fold it, something fell from the pocket. He looked down. A paper bird looked up at him. It was silent. The Little Bird Keeper crouched closer. “Do you still sing?” he asked softly. The boy held the bird closer to his ear. She sounded like snowfall. She sounded like silver. It was somewhere between a breath and a whisper.

*The Little Bird Keeper* grew into a man. Love had found and guided him. It had been a long time since he'd created a bird whose songs made people smile, and his family brought him joy. To watch his daughter grow was his greatest delight.

One night, while his family slept, he heard his daughter cry. He hurried, by the dim moonlight, to her room. She was sitting upright in bed. "What's the matter?" he asked.

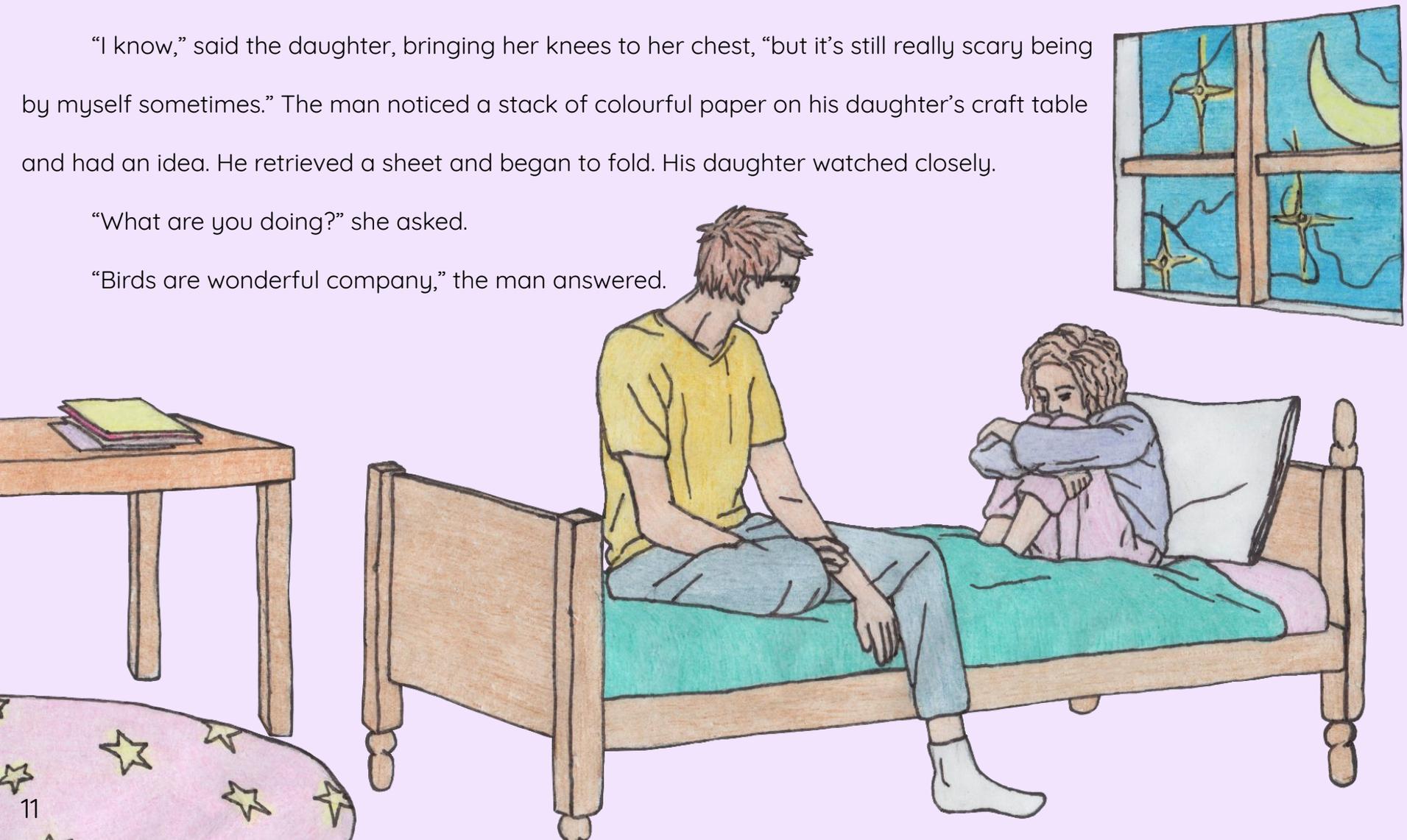
"I had a bad dream," she replied. The man sat beside his daughter to comfort her.

"It's okay now. None of it was real."

"I know," said the daughter, bringing her knees to her chest, "but it's still really scary being by myself sometimes." The man noticed a stack of colourful paper on his daughter's craft table and had an idea. He retrieved a sheet and began to fold. His daughter watched closely.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Birds are wonderful company," the man answered.



With the final fold, the paper bird held its head high. With a grin, the father placed it in his daughter's outstretched hands. His daughter's eyes widened at such magic and wonder. "Her voice is beautiful," she said with a smile. The man smiled softly in return. He couldn't hear the bird sing, but he didn't mind. It was enough to see the light in his daughter's eyes. The daughter, a little bird keeper, nestled more deeply into bed and held her bird close. The man tucked her in then went to her bedroom door.

"Good night you two," he said gently. As the man opened the door, he thought he could hear a twitter. He turned back to the lovingly, carefully folded bird nestled in his daughter's hand. Suddenly, its song rang clear, piercing the darkness.

The man listened. The Little Bird Keeper closed her eyes. It sounded like snowfall. It sounded like silver. It was powerful, calm, the breath of seawater.

