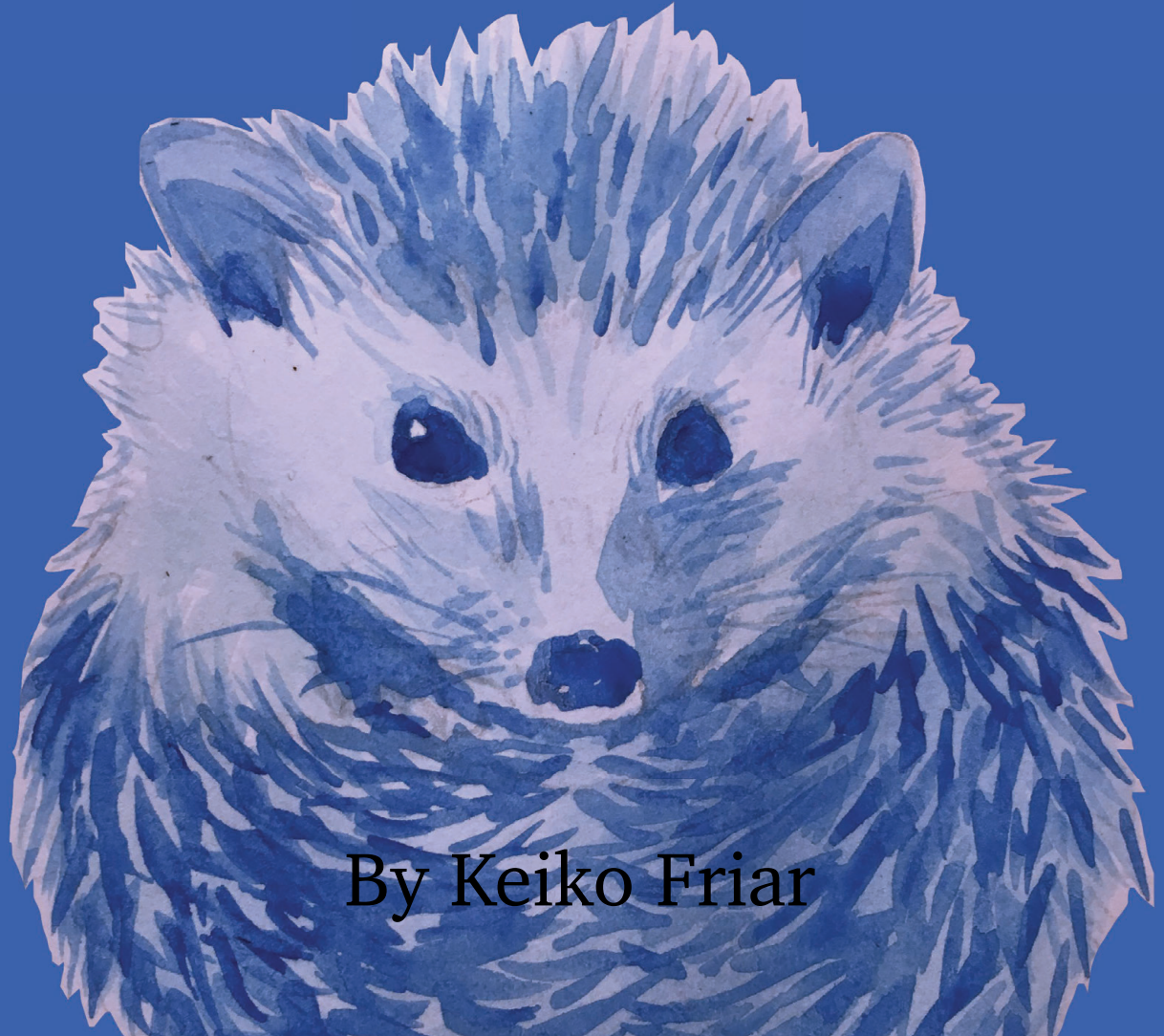


Little Blue



By Keiko Friar

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Dedication

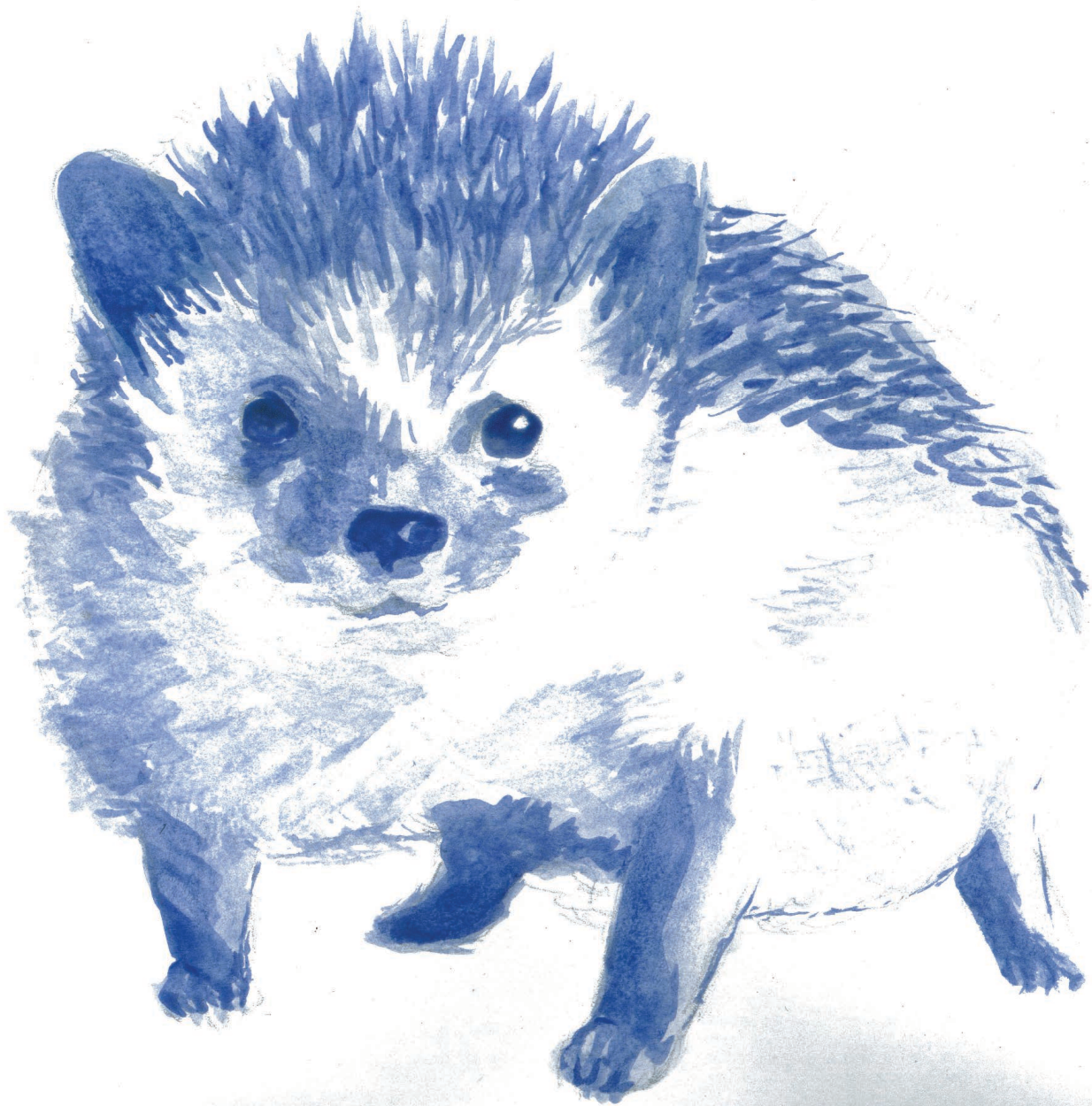
*To Mom and Dad, who loved me first
To Caitlyn, who stays through thick and thin,
And to my found family, who showed me the way home.*

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Our Stories

This book is for you, reader. Every chapter tells about how we choose to keep going, even when life is hard. We wanted to share our stories, so that whoever reads them might find comfort. Please share the book if you find it helpful. We are here with you always.



Hedgehog

Sometimes I pretend to be tough and rough. I hide my softness behind sharp points. I make-believe I am scary so nothing can make me sad.

But my heart is heavy. I don't always know why.

Not everyone understands how I feel, and that's okay. What I feel is real. Feeling sad does not make me a bad person, just like feeling angry does not make me a bad person.



It's really okay to feel however I feel. Some days I'm even happy!

I know my real friends want me around no matter what. They love me when I'm smiling, they love me when I'm frowning. They want me to be well just as much as I want them to be well. I can ask them to sit with me, to play jump rope with me, so I know I am not alone.

Asking for support is a brave thing to do. It can be hard too. But I deserve support, and I am brave enough even when I feel small.



Kiwi

My wings do not let me fly like other birds do. Sometimes I forget I have them at all. They are too tiny. No matter how hard I try, I cannot fly. I cannot flutter.

I wish I could be a hawk or an owl. I wish I could be a swift or a dove. Other birds make it look so easy.

I want to feel as agile and quick, as light and graceful. If everyone else is flying fine, why can't? What's wrong with me?

After thinking long about it, I have realized the answer. Nothing is wrong with me. I cannot fly, but I can sing and dance and have a family. I can nest and find food and love others. I can survive, and I do it very well.

Others can fly, but everyone faces different challenges. My flightless wings do not make me lesser than anyone. My talents do not make me better than anyone either. I cannot be anyone else, and no one can be me.





Bee

My family is full of hard workers. My sisters make the best honeycomb. My mother finds the best flowers. I am proud of being a hard worker.

The older I get, the more work there is to be done. We find more and more flowers. We have to make more and more honey.

These days I get exhausted. I just cannot do as much as I want to do. I feel bad when my siblings gather more nectar than I do. If only I could do more, I would pull my weight. Maybe then my family would be proud of me too.

I have learned to soften my high expectations. I always try my best, even if it isn't very much. That is something to be proud of. My heart is in the work. My family sees that.

I can still be proud of being a hard worker. I don't have to make the whole world sweet.

Every day, I choose to do what I can. That is enough, and I am enough.







Rhino

I like being a leader. I like giving others advice and protecting them. Friends look up to me. It makes me feel mighty.

Nobody worries about me, though. They think I'm the strongest of us all. But I don't always feel strong.

When I step on thorns or hear sad news I hurt inside. When I make mistakes I feel unforgivable. If I don't see my family I miss them so much my belly flips over.

I am always there for my friends to lean on. But when I feel weak it's hard to lean on others.

Then I remember that feeling weak and being weak are not the same.

When I have what I need, I am able to be a better friend. Being honest about what I need and want can make things better. We all deserve to have our needs met.

No one can be tough all the time.



Bat

The first few times I hung upside down, the owls called me strange. They say they're better because they rest the "natural" way.

"Mammals sleep on the ground or in nests. Birds roost upright. Your kind are doing it the wrong way on purpose," the youngest owl told me.

It just feels natural to hang by my feet. But I could try it their way. When I said this, some bats made fun of me: "Go sleep outside by yourself if you're so special," one bat said. I did not think I was special. I just wanted to belong.

There is no way to please everybody. I decided to do what felt right for me.

Some nights I sleep upside down with the bats. Other nights I sleep upright with the owls. A couple members from each group join me.

These days, folks still say mean things. But I don't have to choose between the bats and the owls. I share myself with those who accept me. And I won't stop being myself to make others comfortable.

It helps to find community with those like me. We can be "strange" together.





Jaguar

My family is very small, and we don't see each other much. I spend a lot of time on my own. I like it that way.

But sometimes others confuse me for my sisters and brothers: "Your spots all look the same."

We even get confused with other big cats, like leopards and cheetahs. The llamas think we all know each other, but we live in different parts of the world.

From far away, the llamas admire my spots. "How unique," they say. "How exotic."

It does not feel like a real compliment, because when I approach, they shy away. They don't want to get to know me. They only like looking from afar.

The spots of my coat make me look like an outsider, so few really trust me.

I want to be seen for more than my spots. I want to be known for sitting under the summer full moon. I want to be known for loving rain puddles.

I cannot change my coat, or make the spots go away. Instead I speak through my actions. My looks are only part of me.





Deer

Most days I used to feel hopeless, as if nothing good would happen. An empty feeling grew in me. Happy thoughts slipped my mind. I had no interest in anything.

And then one morning a butterfly landed on my back. He told me I was fascinating, and asked if he could ride for a while. I said yes.

He told me about his life, how he had been afraid to leave his familiar cocoon. He was unsure he would survive out in the world. I told him how I felt pointless in my life.

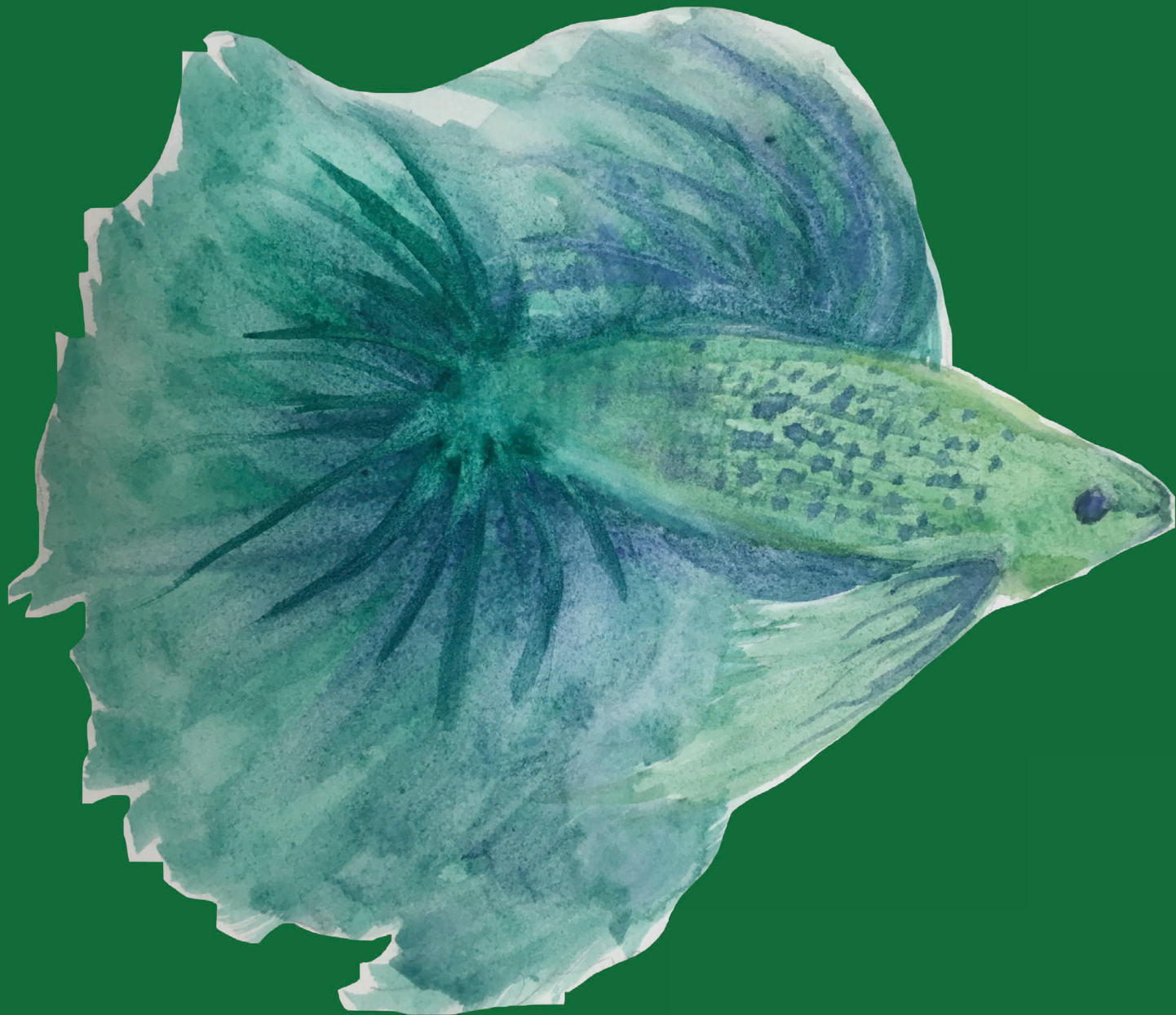
“You’re my friend, so you’re important to me now,” he whispered. He fluttered overhead.

When I feel hopeless, I think about the butterfly. When I scold myself to be better, I remember him. I let go of trying to force happiness.

We don’t see each other much now. But in my mind I carry him on my back all the time. He tells me to take breaths, be gentle with myself: “You’re my precious friend.”

Just one friend can make a huge difference. I am important to me now.





Beta Fish

I used to feel so ugly. Those fish with beautiful fins have so many friends. Like the neighborhood boys, who race each other with their long, shiny tails.

I asked to join them. “No, you’re just a girl, your tail isn’t long enough to be in our group,” they answered.

I ached to be included. I started to swim every day as fast as I could, so I could feel stronger. “Stumpy tail,” they would yell.

After weeks of trying, I worked up enough courage to yell back.

“My tail isn’t like yours, but it’s just as good. I matter just as much as you do. If you don’t see that, I don’t want to spend time with you.”

When I said it, I forgot about feeling ugly. I forgot about being sad. I felt proud. I protected myself.

Nowadays I speak up more. I continue to swim for myself. I have my own group of friends. Anyone can join, as long as we all respect each other.





Turtle

Every few seasons, some of us leave home. We must find new places to live. This year it is my turn to swim, swim as far as I can.

The problem is I don't know where I'm going. Where am I supposed to go? There is too much of the ocean to choose from, so many directions.

My whole family travels on this journey, but we each do it alone.

My family can be mean. Before I left they said this trip would break me. They said I couldn't do it like all the turtles had before us. They said I would get lost, that I was better off lost.

And now I am all alone.

But I won't be forever. After swimming over this coral, that seaweed, those caves, there will be something more. There will be something after the sadness.

The struggle is only part of the story.

No one can go on this journey for me, so I must do it. I will hum to myself. One day I will look back and be glad I kept going. I will make my own way forward.

The End.



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