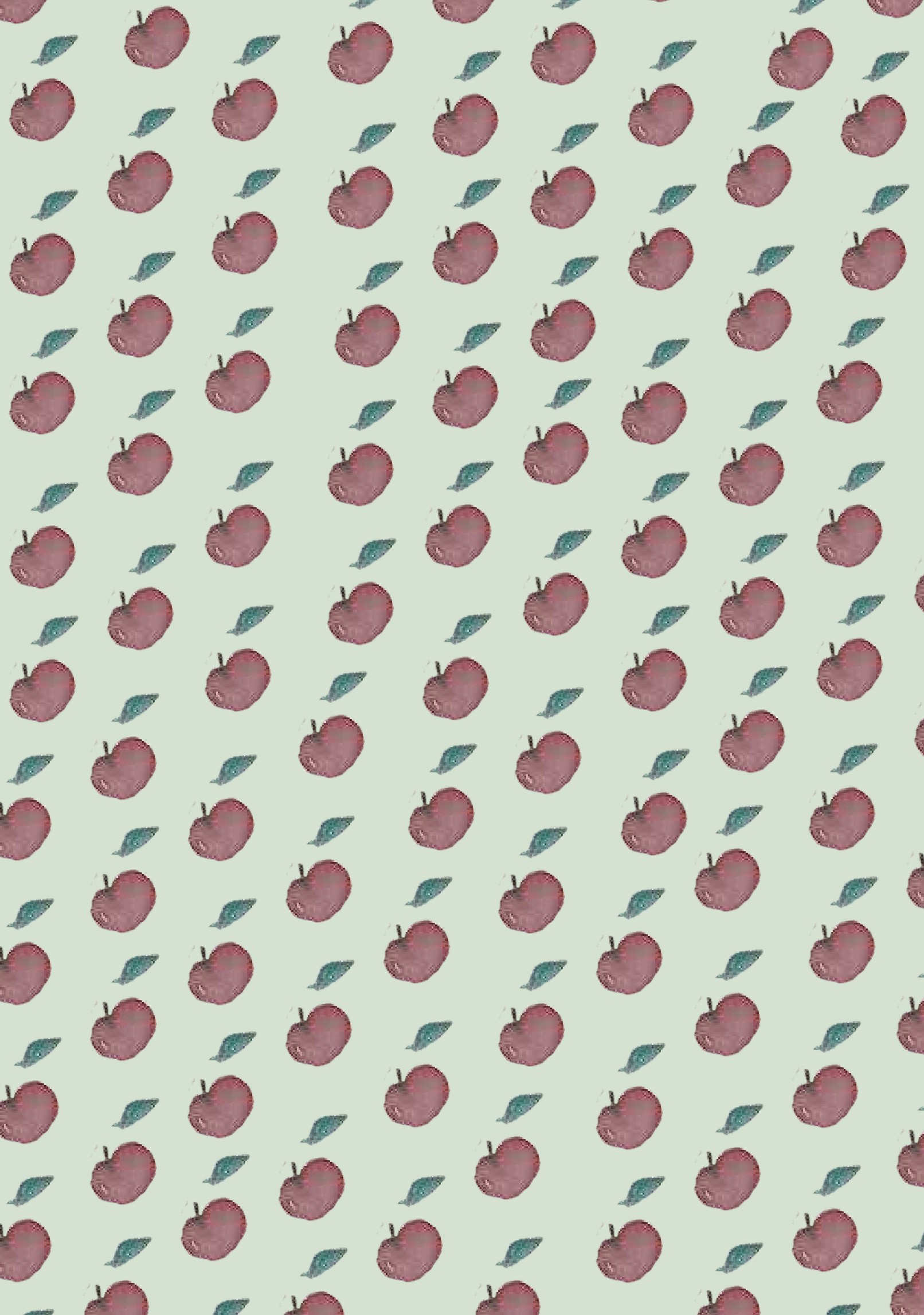




Where is Mama Bear!

Created by
CRSB (Women)

Illustrated by
ABB women inmates



Where is Mama Bear?

By CRSB (Women) & Women Inmates



Singapore Prison Service (SPS)
980 Upper Changi Road North
Singapore 507708

Where is Mama Bear?

Written by Chang Xin En

Illustrations by Women Inmates

With contributions from Mdm Doris Ng, Superintendent of Singapore's Women Prison

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Preface

Being separated from a parent can be a scary, confusing, and painful experience for a child. Yet it is not easy for an incarcerated mother or family member to navigate such difficult conversations, sometimes due to the desire to protect the child's feelings or discomfort in the child having learnt the truth. Nonetheless, excluding them from adult conversations may leave them piecing together bits of information and forming their own conclusions of the unspoken.

Within the confines of these pages lies a tale crafted with love, understanding and the belief that stories have the power to heal and connect hearts. This book is dedicated to those who guide and those who seek guidance - incarcerated mothers who remain committed to love their children from behind the bars, little ones who patiently await their mother's return, concerned loved ones with some even standing in as a caregiver, and helping professionals.

To our resilient mothers, we recognise the complexities of explaining your absence to your child and hope to convey a love for them that transcends physical distance. To the cherished children, we want to tell you something important - you are not alone and your feelings, questions, and dreams matter. To the caring hearts supporting mother and child, we value your role in nurturing connections and fostering understanding.

As we turn the pages together, let us embark on a journey of storytelling and connection. This book could be a companion, a guide, or a source of comfort to help navigate those conversations with empathy and courage. May it serve as a bridge connecting the hearts of mothers and children, between the present and the future and across the spaces that separate them.

Note by Institution A4 Supt

Every prison sentence carries more than legal consequences. It carries emotional ones, on both sides of the walls. When a mother goes to prison, her absence is felt in every part of a child's world. The child is left with unanswered questions and a longing for connection. The mother is left with regret, sorrow and a love that fights to be felt. The impact goes even beyond – there are the practical, social and developmental aspects. The child may face stigma, disrupted studies and home environment, and struggles with the absent caregiver.

This book was created with love – warmly written by our correctional rehabilitation specialist and beautifully illustrated by women inmate artists, many of them mothers themselves. Together, they wanted to send a message of connection, love and hope.

To every child missing a mother behind bars, this book was written with you in mind. You are not to blame, you are not forgotten, and you are deeply loved. The pages are here to remind that your feelings matter, and I hope the words and pictures bring you comfort and strength.

To every incarcerated mother, your voice and your bond with your child matters. May these pages bring clarity and healing to everyone who turns the page.

May this book uplift spirits, spark hope and heal hearts.

Doris Ng
Superintendent A4 (Women Prison)



Author's Note

As the storyteller behind these pages, I draw inspiration from varied conversations with mothers striving to bridge the gap between incarceration and the hearts of their children. This book echoes some of the hard questions that children may ask, with characters and writing that are intentionally kept light-hearted and simple for young children to better understand their mother's absence. It is my sincere hope that the poetic dialogue between Mama Bear and Baby Bear offers comfort, sparks conversations, and cultivates empathy for the reader.

Wishing you stories of strength and stars,
Xin En



*MISS CHANG XIN EN IS A SENIOR CORRECTIONAL
REHABILITATION SPECIALIST FROM THE SINGAPORE PRISON
SERVICE. SHE, ALONGSIDE INCREDIBLE COLLEAGUES FROM THE
CORRECTIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES BRANCH (WOMEN),
PROVIDE REHABILITATIVE SERVICES TO WOMEN OFFENDERS
SUCH AS COUNSELLING.*

Illustrators' Note

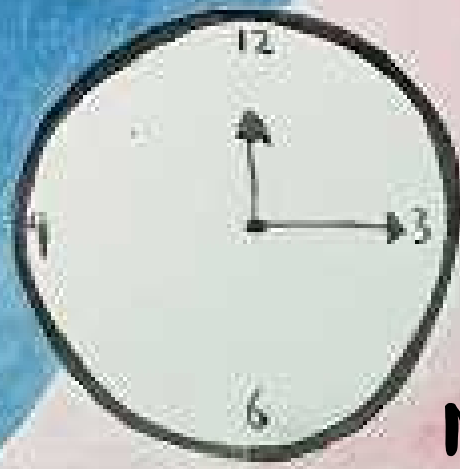
It was our very first time dealing with illustrations, and we had totally zero clue where to begin. We had shaky faith but were eager to try, as we were all up for a challenge. Regardless of the results, it was our rule to first give it a try.

We referenced our fellow friends' expressions to draw the bears' expressions. A lot of thought went into this, as we wanted the illustrations to be as close to the words that we hoped to convey. We also referenced other children's books as a start.

To the children, we hope that you will be able to relate to the expressions on baby bear, and gain a glimpse of what mama bear may be feeling.

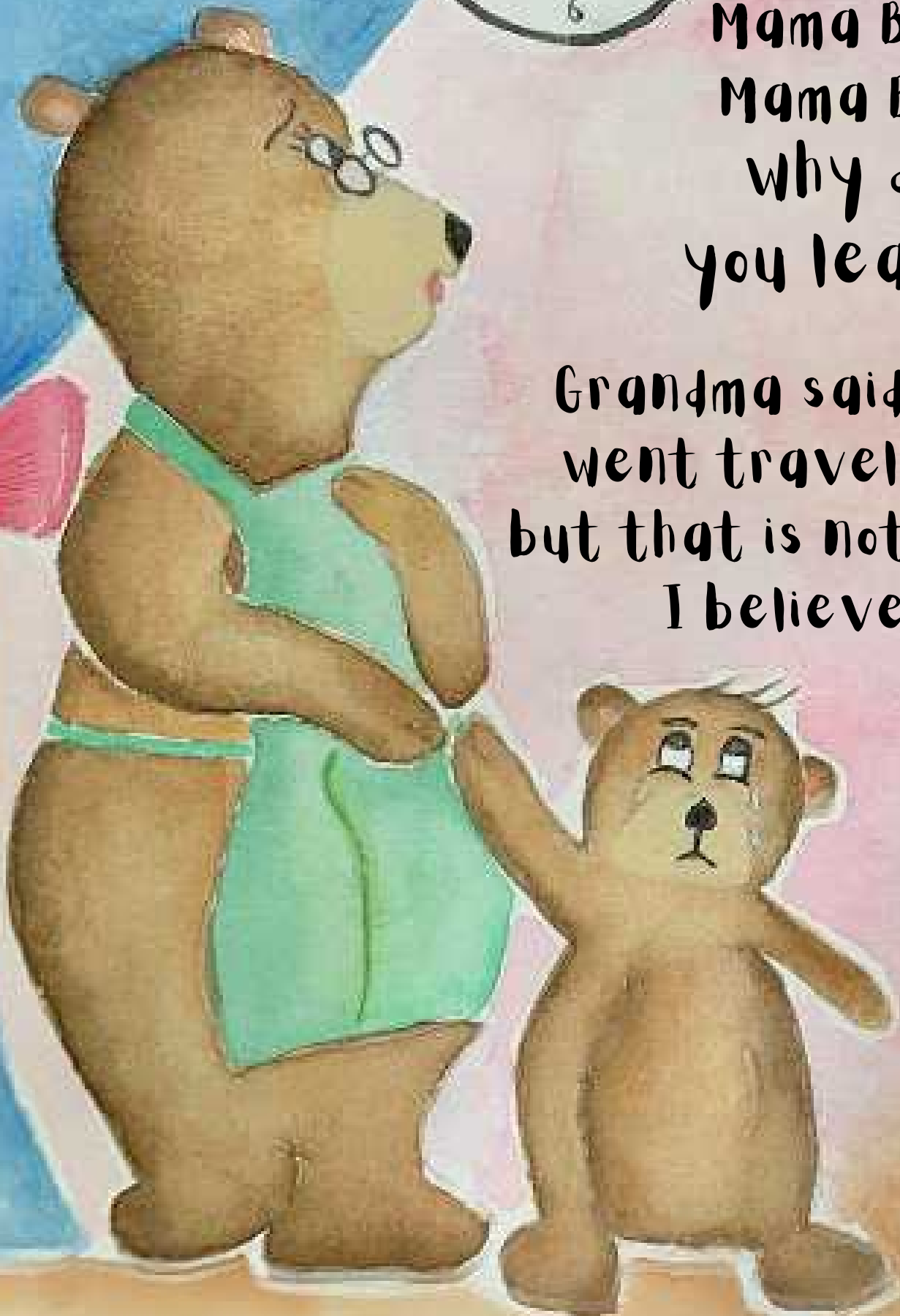
We hope that readers would be able to see the struggles of mothers when they have to leave their child and take accountability for their mistakes. We also hope to shed light that these mistakes are not only felt through the mothers, but also the children and family as a whole.

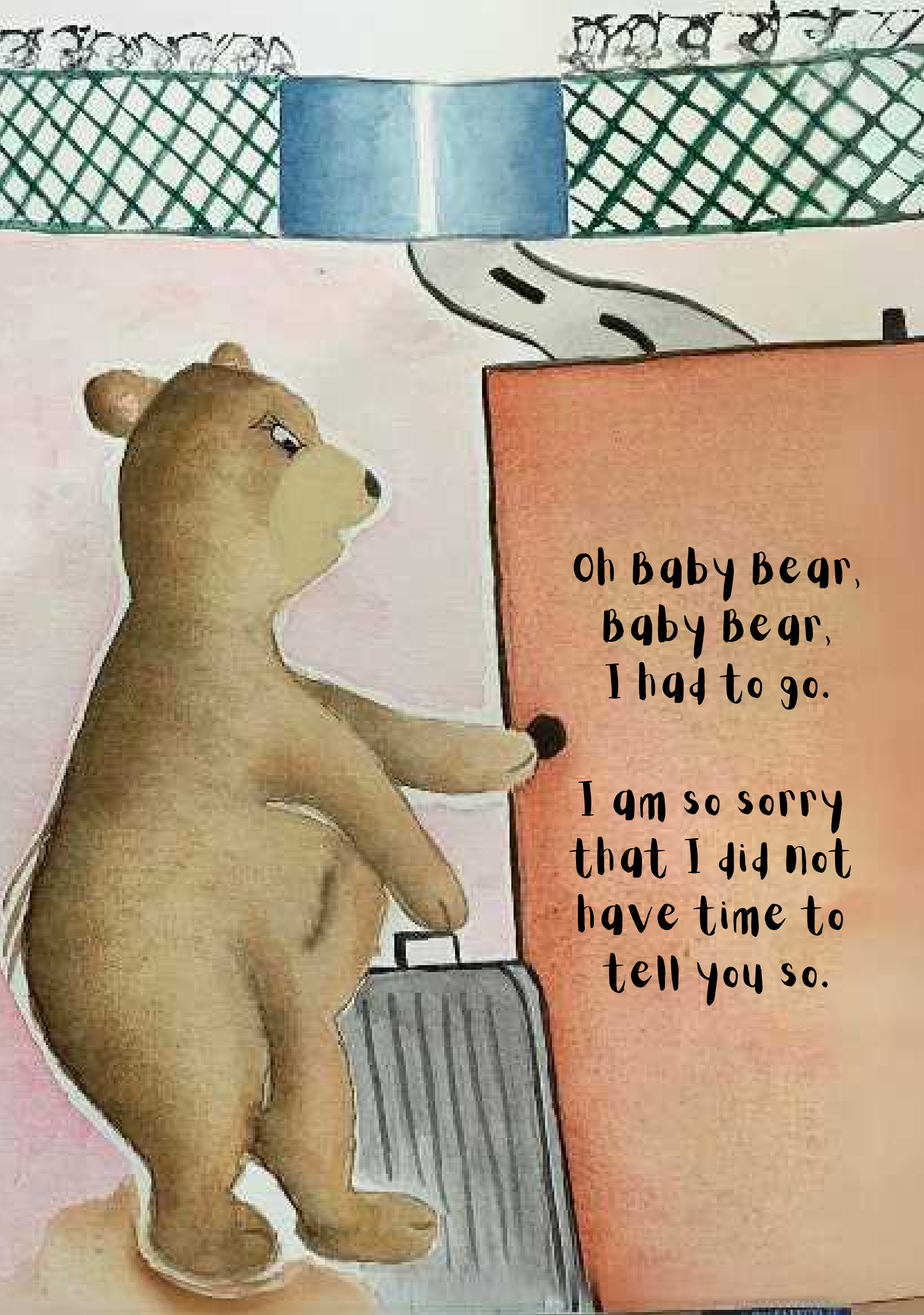




**Mama Bear,
Mama Bear,
why did
you leave?**

**Grandma said you
went travelling,
but that is not what
I believe.**





Oh Baby Bear,
Baby Bear,
I had to go.

I am so sorry
that I did not
have time to
tell you so.

Mama Bear,
Mama Bear,

did I do something
wrong?

Did you not
love me anymore,
that you would go so
far and for so long?



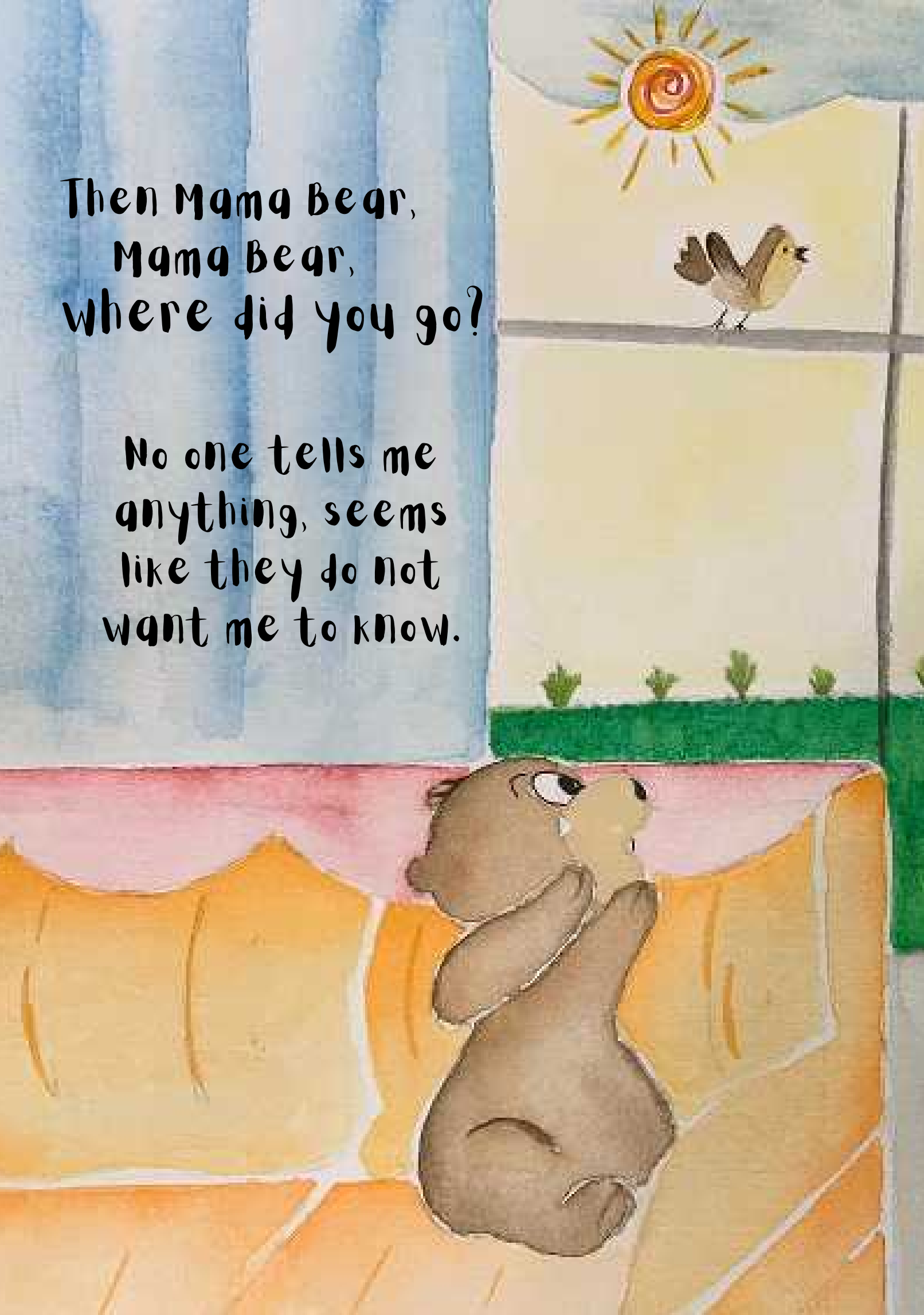
No Baby Bear,
Baby Bear,
I am sad that you
think this way.

Please know I
love you so much,
no matter what
people say.



Then Mama Bear,
Mama Bear,
where did you go?

No one tells me
anything, seems
like they do not
want me to know.

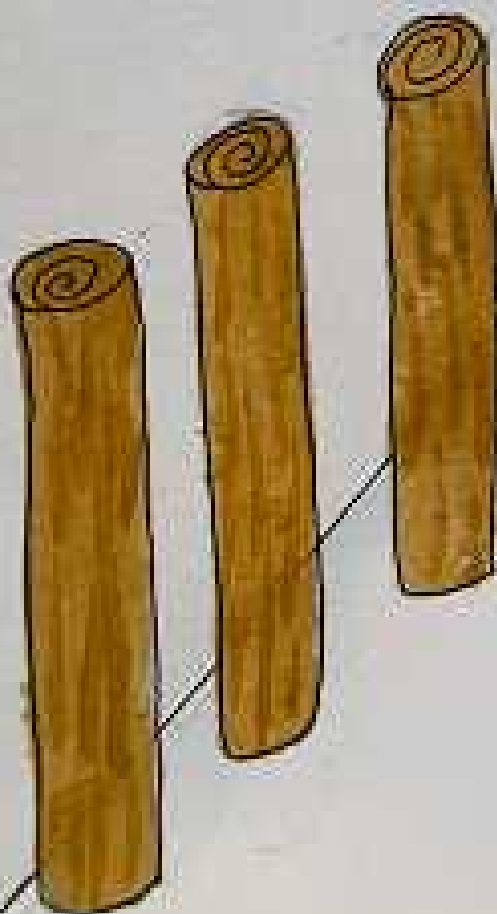
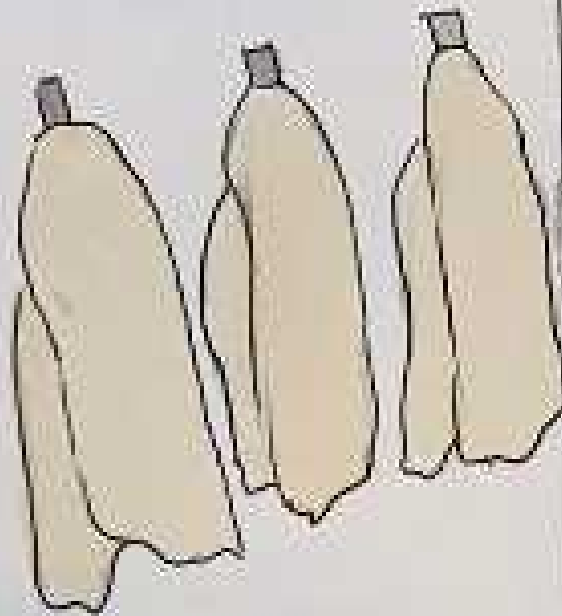




Oh Baby Bear,
Baby Bear,
they are just
worried you would
be sad.

The truth is I
went to prison,
because some
things I did
were bad.

"ATTENTION ALL INMATES,



PLEASE SIT FOR MUSTER CHECK!"



Mama Bear,
Mama Bear,
what did you do?

only naughty people
go to prison,
were you naughty too?



Yes Baby Bear,
Baby Bear,
I made a big
mistake.

I should have
thought about you,
and think through
the decisions
I make.



Mama Bear,
Mama Bear,
this makes me
blue.

You broke your
promise,
now how do I know
what is true?



Oh Baby Bear,
Baby Bear,
how terrible
that must feel.

Promises are
a big thing,
I am sorry to have
disappointed you.



**Mama Bear,
Mama Bear,
is prison so far?**



**Can't they
let you go,
so we can return to
how things are?**

No, Baby Bear,
Baby Bear,
it is the same
for everybody.

I need to try
making things
right, and take
responsibility.



Mama Bear,
Mama Bear, sometimes
my heart
feels pain.

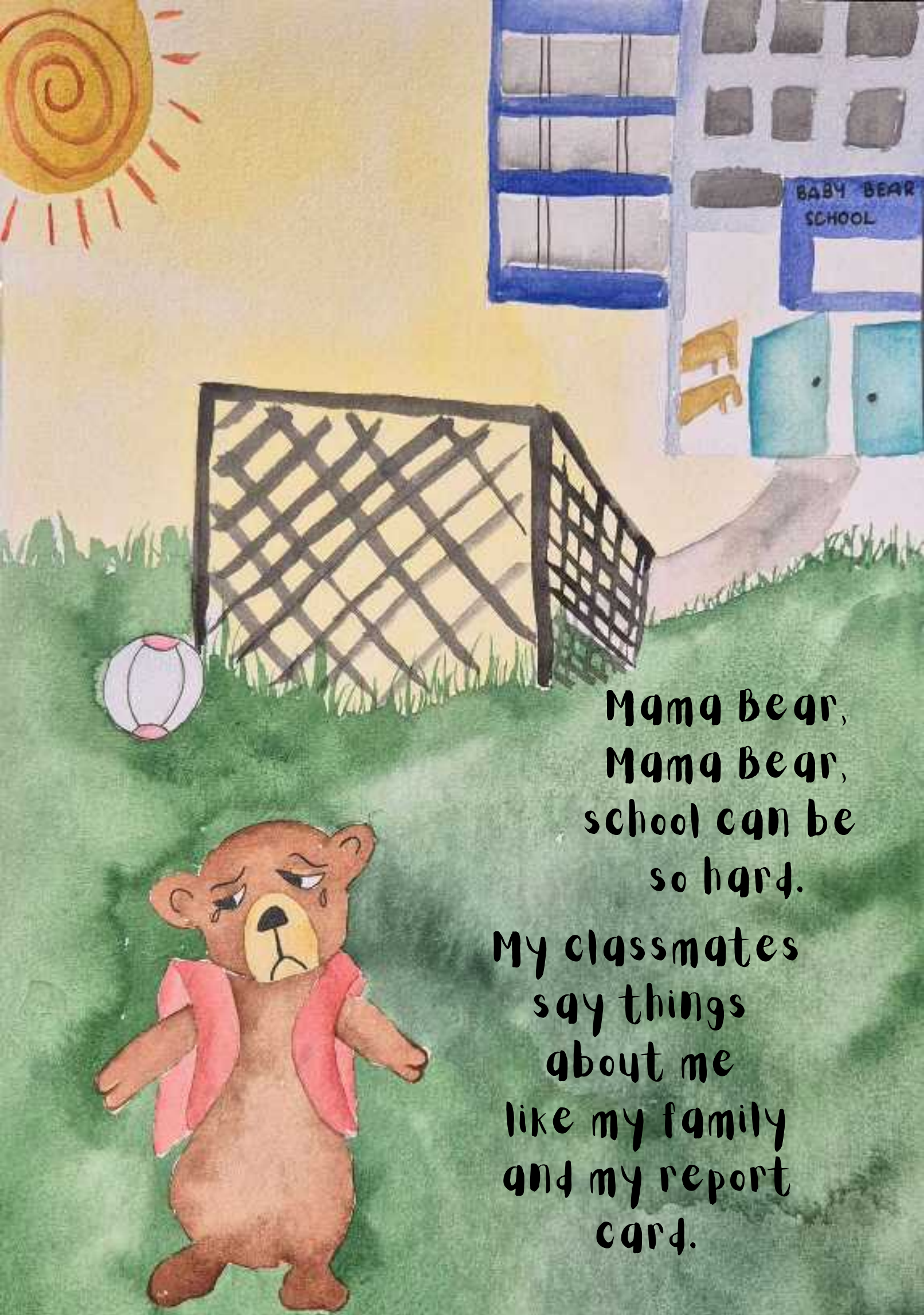
When can you
come back,
will I see
you again?



Yes Baby Bear,
Baby Bear,
I will return.

I am just given
some time now
to think and
to learn.





Mama Bear,
Mama Bear,
school can be
so hard.

My classmates
say things
about me
like my family
and my report
card.

Oh Baby Bear,
Baby Bear,
no matter how many
times or tries.



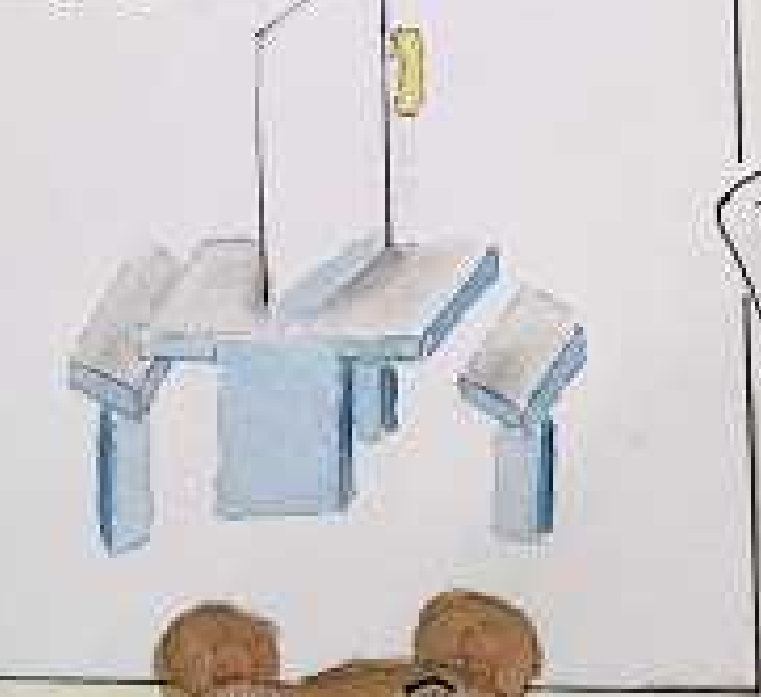
Please know that
you are precious,
let no one tell
you otherwise.

Mama Bear,
Mama Bear,
what happens
now?



can I visit you?
what do they
allow?





Yes Baby Bear,
Baby Bear,
you can write
to me or visit.

It may not
be often,
but think of all
the stories when
we meet!

Mama Bear,
Mama Bear,

thank you for
telling me.

Now I know
what happened,
and understand
what I see.



Do remember
Baby Bear,
one thing is clear.

I love you and I miss you,
that you never
have to fear.



Gentle Message to Mums

- Communicating with your child about your incarceration does not need to be complicated. Use simple, clear language and share information that is suitable for your child's age and developmental stage.
- Where possible, speak with your loved ones and caregivers on how you may communicate the same message to your child.
- Your child's response to your incarceration may affect you and you may experience different feelings of your own. Do attend to your own feelings first and give yourself some emotional space before validating and attending to your child's feelings.
- Create a safe space for your child to express feelings they may have, such as anger, sadness, or confusion, about your absence and the situation.

Gentle Message to Mums

- Reassure your child often that they are loved and that the separation is not their fault.
- Be mindful of the promises you make as they can mean a lot to your child.
- Model taking responsibility for mistakes and choices in a way your child can understand and learn from.



Resources



Singapore Prison Service – Project Hope

Project Hope is an initiative between Singapore Prison Service (SPS) and MOE schools that aims to bridge incarcerated parents with their children through Virtual Conference (VC), minimally once every 3 months during the school term.



Salvation Army – Kids in Play

Provides professional support (e.g., case management) to address the impact of parental incarceration on children and caregivers, help to strengthen familial bonds, and facilitate the reintegration of incarcerated persons with their families.

More information at <https://www.salvationarmy.org.sg/wwd-kids-in-play/>



NeuGen

Proactive interventions that enable and build resilience – NeuEducation (educational intervention such as sponsored tuition), NeuVoice (empowering confidence, personal dignity and emotional uplift, such as mentoring), NeuGrowth (empowering confidence and sense of achievement, such as after-school activity), NeuOhana (rebuilding family bonds and a nurturing environment, such as family day).

More information at <https://www.neugen.org.sg/neu-empowerment-model/>

Resources



New Life Stories – The Family Strengthening Programme

Family Strengthening Programme takes on a more holistic approach to ensure that each child receives vital development and therapeutic services, while their parents are supported during their incarceration, and during their reintegration into society.

More information at <https://www.newlifestories.org.sg/family-strengthening-programme>



Life Community Services Society – Friends of Children & Youth

Helps children and youths, ages 6 to 16, with at least one parent presently or formerly incarcerated. Intervenes in beneficiaries' social, physical, emotional, educational development, as well as provide financial assistance.

More information at <https://life-community.org/programmes/focy/>



Self-Help Groups: SINDA, CDAC, Mendaki, Eurasian Association

Provides affordable tuition scheme/programmes for eligible students to support children's education, amongst other initiatives.

More information at <https://www.sinda.org.sg/>, <https://www.cdac.org.sg/>, <https://www.mendaki.org.sg/> & <https://www.eurasians.sg/>.



Schools

Students may approach their teachers and school counsellors if they are facing difficulties in school/at home.

Acknowledgment

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the remarkable women inmates from Arts Behind Bars (ABB), who dedicated their time and creativity to illustrate this storybook. Their artistic contributions have brought the story to life and enriched the pages with their talent and passion.

We would also like to extend our appreciation to the dedicated officers from Institution A4 who supported and encouraged the ABB inmates throughout the process of illustrating this storybook. Their support and belief in this initiative have helped to make this project a reality.

A big thank you to our social work interns, Natasha Oh and Lim Jia En, who contributed to the preliminary storyboard, compilation of resources, and tedious formatting across the pages.

This collaborative effort would not have been possible without the commitment and enthusiasm of those involved. We are deeply grateful for the collective contributions and support that have made this project a meaningful endeavour.







