

Maria Papayanni

Thekla's Ark

Illustrated by Chiara Fedele

Translated from Greek by Karen Emmerich



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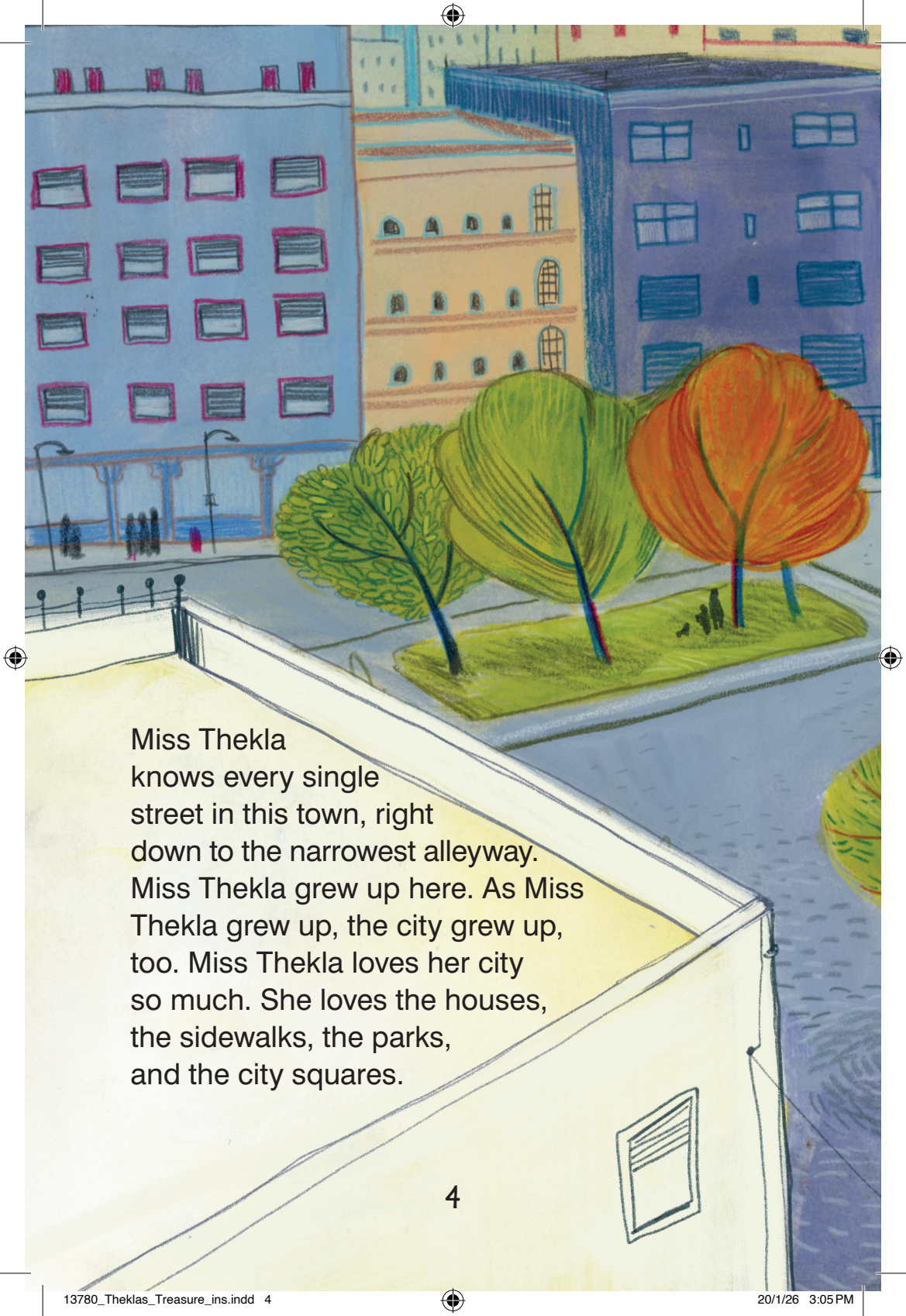
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This is Miss Thekla. Miss Thekla loves kids, animals, trees, birds, boats, the sea, and music. More than anything else, though, she loves taking walks around the city. She's everywhere, all the time.





Miss Thekla
knows every single
street in this town, right
down to the narrowest alleyway.
Miss Thekla grew up here. As Miss
Thekla grew up, the city grew up,
too. Miss Thekla loves her city
so much. She loves the houses,
the sidewalks, the parks,
and the city squares.



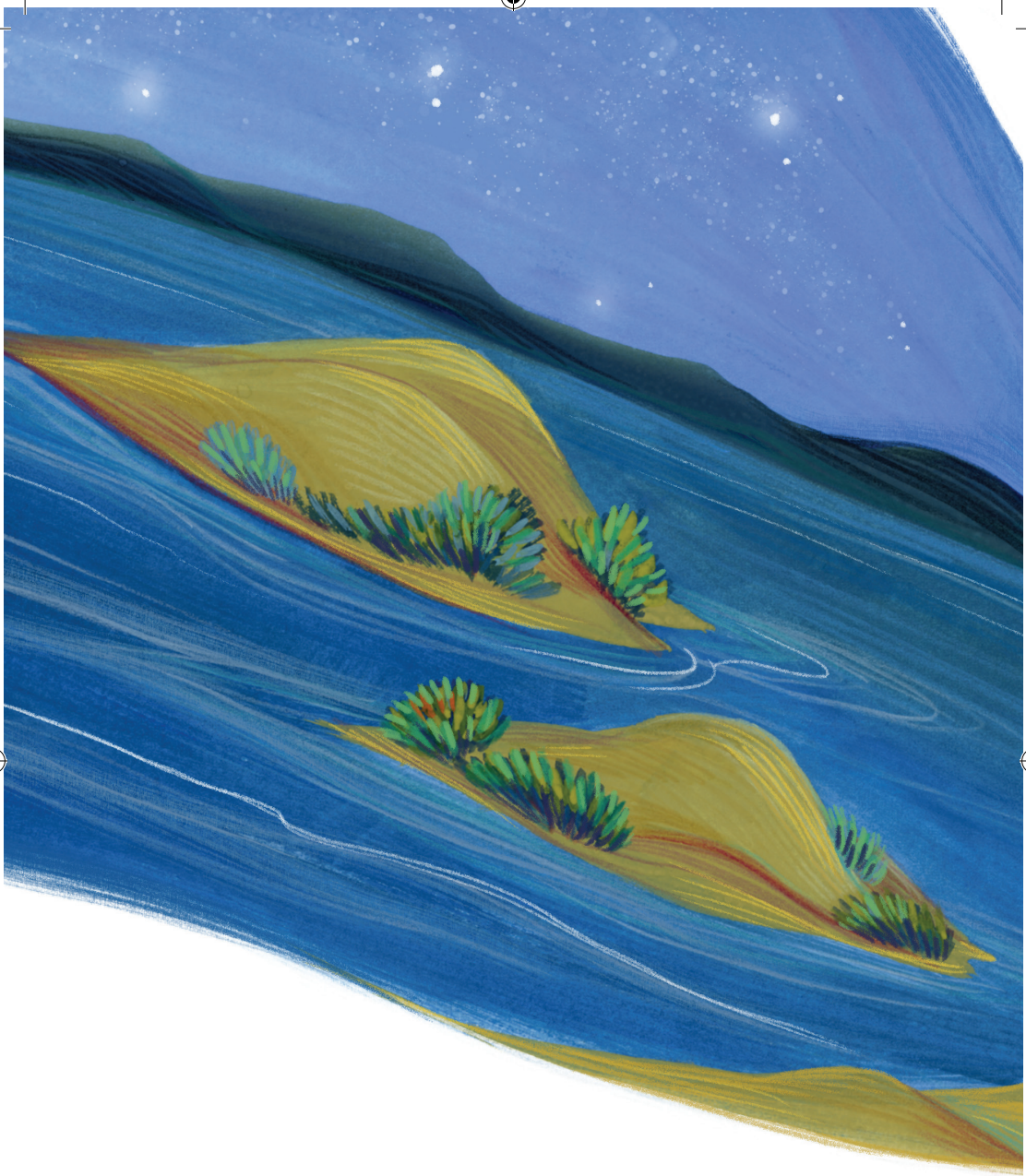
Miss Thekla pushes her shopping cart over stones, over dirt, over bridges, and over grass. She has everything she needs in that cart.

“Hey! Yeah, I’m talking to you! What did you do? Rob a supermarket or something?”

After a while Miss Thekla got used to hearing that sort of thing.







There's no one like Miss Thekla.

She walks by day. She journeys by night.
And she has everything she needs in
her shopping cart.





One day she sees a boy running through
the park, with two men running behind him.
The men stop dead in their tracks,
right in front of Miss Thekla.
They're out of breath, huffing and puffing.



“Did you—huff—happen to see—puff—this dirty little kid come through here? Like a little—huff—street rat—puff—about this tall?”



“Come again?”

“A boy—huff. A boy—puff.”

“Huh? A toy? No one brings toys to this park.”

“No, grandma! Not a toy! A boy! A ratty little kid!”

“A lid? A lid for what?”

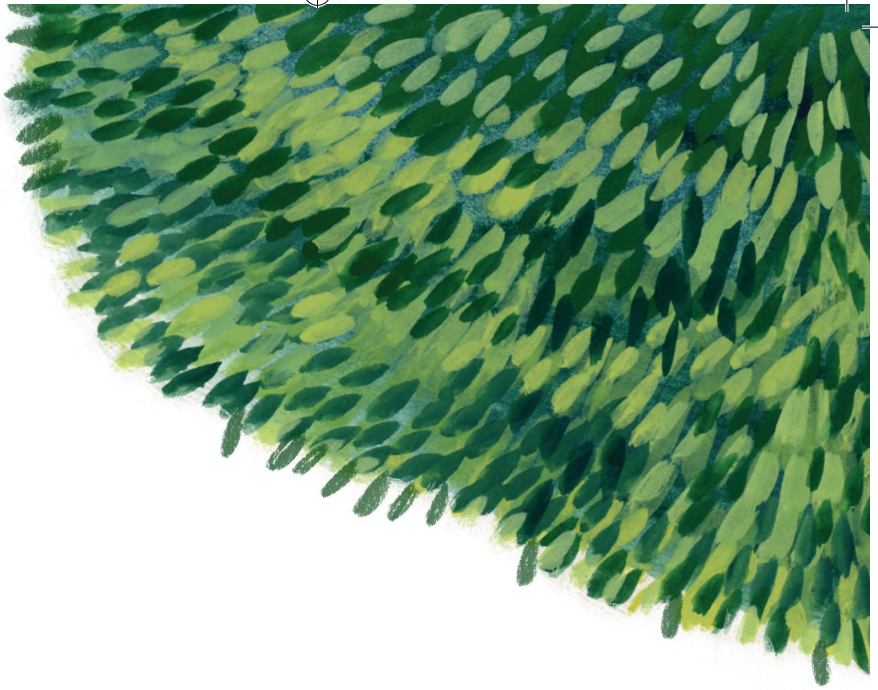
“You’re busting—huff—my chops—puff—
grandma.”

“You’ll have to repeat that. I can’t hear too well
over all the huffing and puffing.”

“Aw, just forget it,” says the other man.

“This woman’s ancient. She’s, like, prehistoric or
something.”





The two men still haven't caught their breaths. They huff and puff their way across the park. Night falls, and the park is empty. Miss Thekla walks toward a pine tree.

“You can come down now. They're gone.”



“How did you know I was up here?”

“I’m friends with this pine tree. And I’m friends with all the birds.”

“Thanks for not blowing my cover.”

“What do you mean?”

“You know, when they asked you if you’d seen me.”

“No one asked me if I’d seen you.”

“No way. I heard them.”

“They asked me if I’d seen a street rat. Are you a street rat?”

“Nope.”



“Alright. Let’s start over, then.
I’m Thekla.”

“I’m Hashim.”

“We should go, Hashim. Before
they close the gates.”

“Want me to push your cart?”





They're walking side by side now. Hashim turns his head from time to time to look at Thekla. She's... sort of strange. Not at all like his grandmother. Actually, she's not at all like anyone. Thekla does an about-face, yanks off her hat, and takes a bow. Hashim applauds.



“I’d say it’s time for a walk, Hashim!”

“A walk? Where should we go?”

“This cart can take us anywhere.”

“What’s in it?”

“Anything I could ever want.”

“But it’s a pretty small cart.”

“You know the story of Noah’s Ark? How do you think he managed to fit all those camels and elephants and cheetahs in there?”

“Can we go to my old room in my old house?”

“You bet we can!”





They get in. The cart whisks them through the city streets. Hashim laughs. Thekla laughs. Hashim looks at Thekla. Yeah, she's definitely not like any grandma he's ever seen. Thekla looks at Hashim. He's no street rat, that's for sure. He's not even a street mouse. He's more like a duck, like a little duckling.



“Hey, Thekla? Do you know if goldfish ever get scared?”

“Goldfish get scared. And so do sharks. As a matter of fact, everyone gets scared sometimes.”

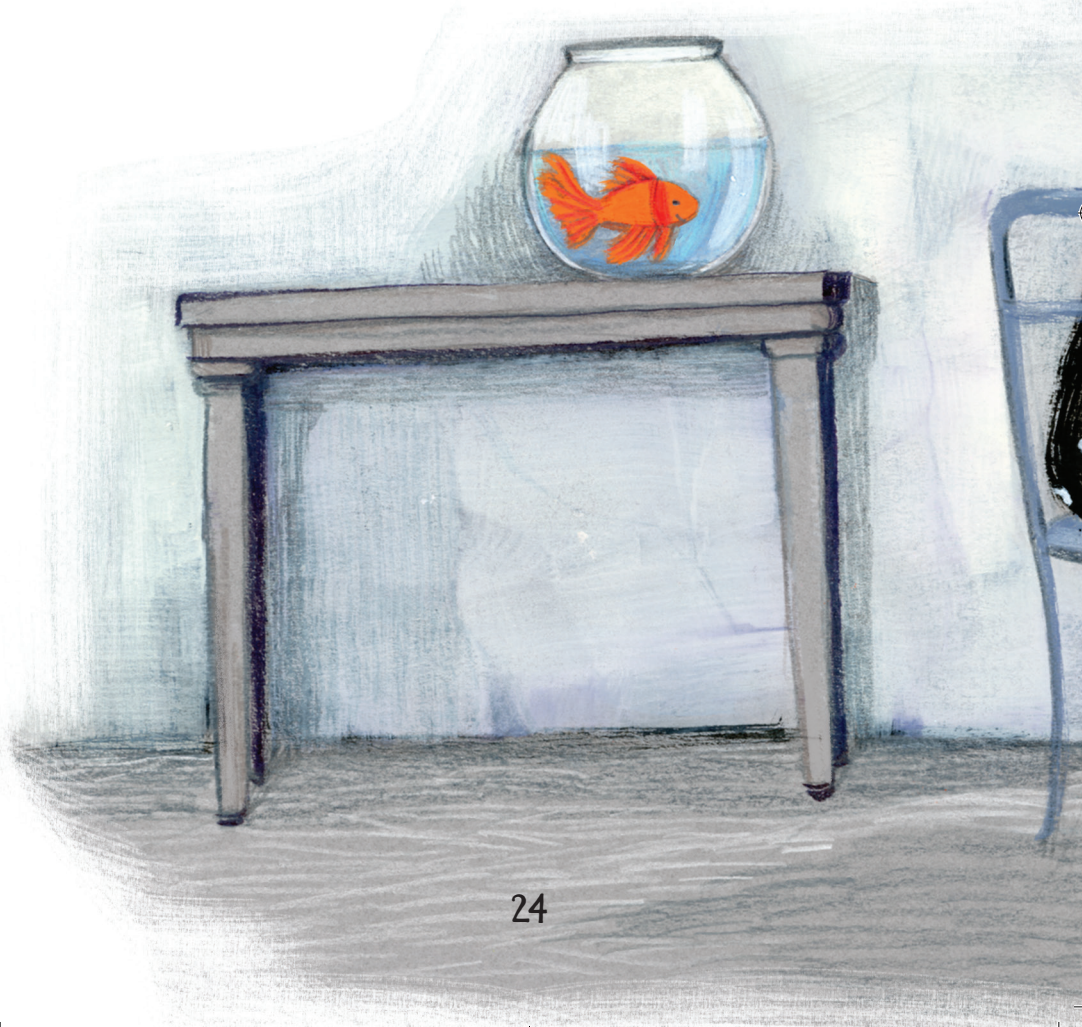


“I left a goldfish all alone in a goldfish tank.
Back where my house is.”

“All alone, huh?”

“Well, my grandma’s there, too. But I think
he might be scared without me.”

“Don’t worry. With the two of them together
they can take all that fear and split it in half.
They’ll be feeling safe in no time.”





Thekla takes a red apple out of her pocket and cuts it in two. Hashim chuckles a bit as he grabs his half.

“We’re here,” says Hashim. He points to a blue door somewhere in the darkness.

“Do you like stories?”

“There’s a lot of books in my house.”

“You mean the house with the goldfish?”

“The house with the goldfish, yeah.”

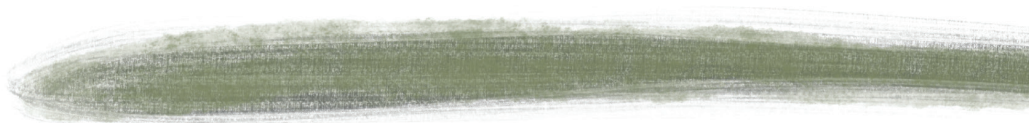
Thekla reaches down to the bottom of the cart and pulls out a book. She hands it to a smiling Hashim.

“Whoa! You have books down there?”

“No.”

“Then what do you have?”

“I have birds, boats, journeys, streets, cities, pirates, warriors... things like that.”







“And all of it fits into a shopping cart?”
“Sure does. Remember what we talked about?”

“The ark?”

“The ark, Hashim.”

“Goodnight, Thekla.”

“Goodnight, Hashim. Oh, does the goldfish have a name?”

“Alsununu. It means songbird.”



That night in bed Hashim reads a story under the covers. It's about a fish that grew wings and flew up into the sky.





While the city sleeps, Thekla pushes a cart full of ships and pirates and warriors and fairies and pine trees and ducklings and goldfish and birds.



That's our story.
Let's play!

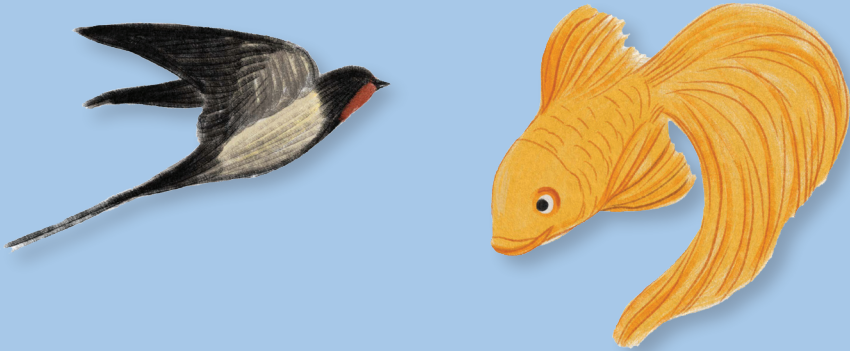


Thekla's cart is like an ark.



Hashim writes the goldfish's name in his language: alsanunu. Can you write the meaning of the name right underneath?

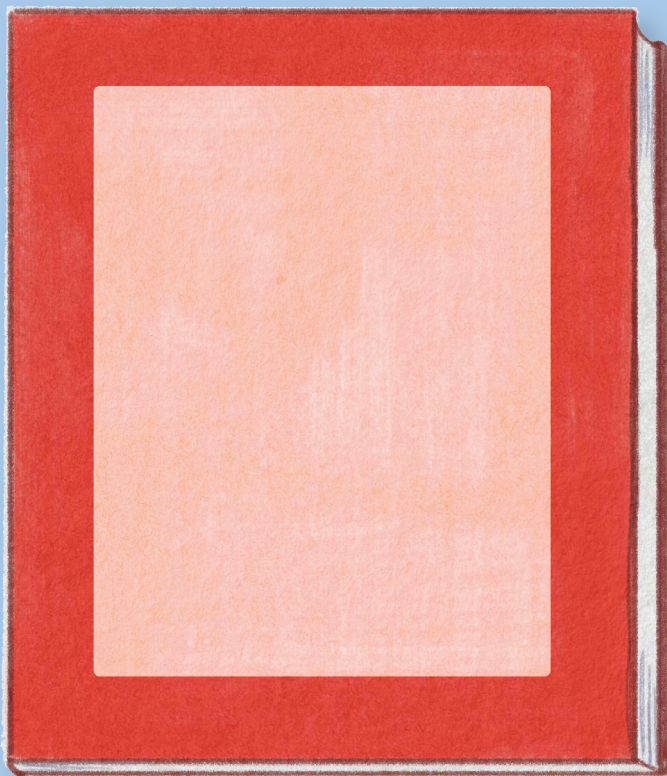
السنونو



Underline only the things that appeared in the story you just read:

There is...
a child who lives alone
a buoy
a woman who loves walks in the city
some bad people
lots of trees
an airplane
a grandmother who's waiting
a goldfish
books

Hashim really loves to read.
Which of your books would you like him to read?
Can you draw its cover?



“Everyone gets scared sometimes,” says Thekla.
Are you scared sometimes?
Who do you share your fears with?
Draw or write about the thing you’re most afraid of.



I share my fears with...

.....
.....

