

MIGHTY M.T.

M.T. FINDS HIS VOICE



Jonathon Scott Fuqua

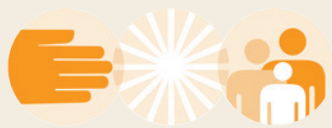


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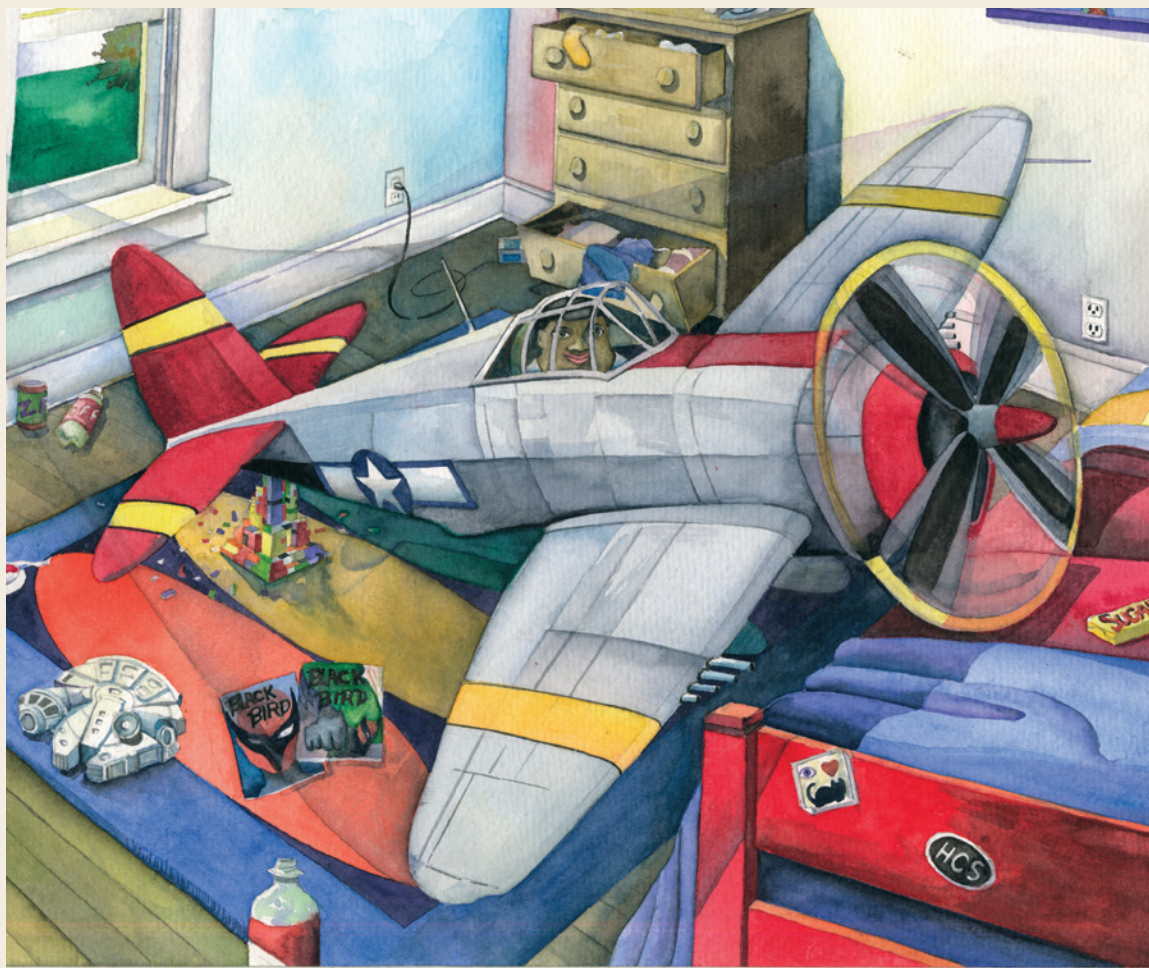
MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES
OF TEENS AND YOUNG FAMILIES



Chapter 1



Whenever MT Pitt shut his eyes, he was whoever he wanted to be. MT, see, had a creative mind. It was so creative that when he got home from school, usually all he did was sit, eat snacks, and imagine. It was his way of dealing with the world, a world he found harder than it needed to be.



Regardless, in daydreams, MT found comfort. Usually, he imagined himself a heroic Tuskegee Airman in a twisting, whirling dog-fight over Germany during World War II. In a silver airplane, he rocketed across the sky, cut clouds in half, and climbed toward the sun before dropping like a claw hawk on an unsuspecting German pilot.

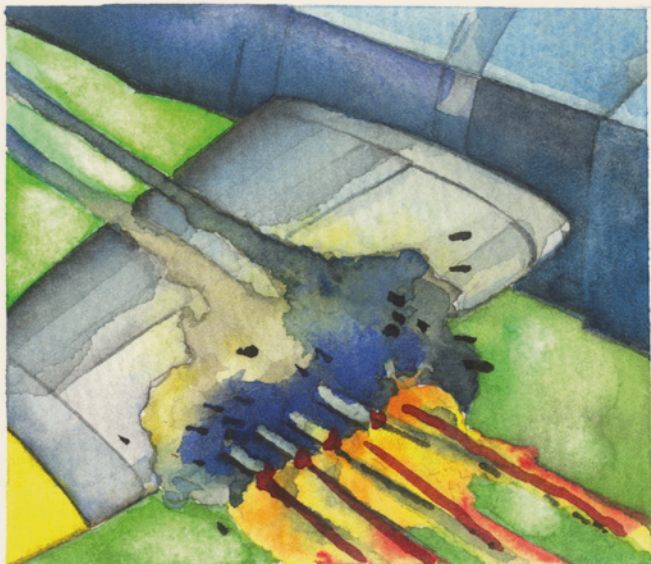
He was good.

His engine roared and growled as he made dizzying turns and harrowing descents that pushed him back against his seat.

His guns rattled. Brass shell-casings tumbled like small flairs in the sky.

He was engulfed by the smell of burning oil.

MT was the world's most decorated Tuskegee Airman.



In fact, in his dreams,
everyone was jealous.

Even friends.

Even his family.

And especially his bothersome sister.

Sadly, though, in the real world, MT wasn't tall enough to be a Tuskegee Airman. Next to one of his heroes, he'd look like a large, curvaceous fire hydrant. He was almost as wide as he was tall, and he was more than out of shape to pilot a fighter plane, which requires the reflexes of a jungle cat.





Back when MT was a baby, he was round. Upon entering kindergarten, he was rounder. And at the start of second grade, MT was, well, a curvaceous fire hydrant.

He'd eaten far too much. He still ate too much.

Along the way, he'd hardly gotten any exercise at all. His reflexes were more cow than cat. His parents, both school teachers, didn't know what to do. MT was a humorous, intense

boy. They worried for his feelings. They didn't insist that he get exercise or eat less. Instead, they explained to him that maybe he was overweight due to genetics, which is a scientific term that means a person might be overweight because of the people they are related to. This happens all of the time. Often, kids look like their parents or other relatives, like grandparents or uncles or aunts.

In MT's life, MT blamed his Uncle Reardon, who, to be honest, resembled a semi-aquatic herbivore, a hippo. He had legs like tarred pilings. His stomach hung like rucksack over his belt. His arms drooped from shoulders so round that his head resembled a large gray boulder balanced on mounded earth. He weighed too much. In the same way that MT



had hands like his father's and eyes like his grandmother's, maybe MT had a body like Uncle Reardon's. He hoped not.

At the same time, MT took solace in the Uncle Reardon idea. It meant that he had no control over his own overweightness. Maybe, no matter what he did, he was always going to be too big. He could run marathons, box, or spearfish, and he'd be exactly the same. So why try? Really, he might as well do nothing, which is exactly what he had done since he'd learned to walk.

NOTHING.

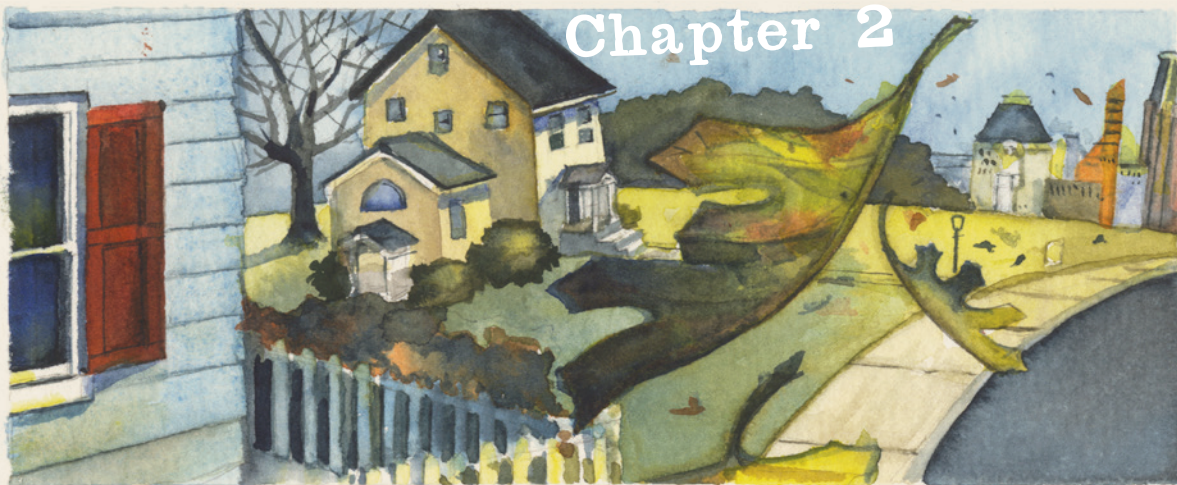


Therefore, due to MT's rather obvious issues, he was a target, a softie, a patsy for students who tormented the weak and wounded. One boy came at him like piranha on a lamb shank. Another like a hyena to a carcass. The water was always red. In school, MT was

ground zero.



Chapter 2



Over the city, the sky was blue and cloudless. Flocks of geese flew south. Leaves gently drifted from tree branches. And the school day was over.

Thank goodness.

In Baltimore's neighborhoods, most boys hung out outdoors. They talked. They showed off to girls. Some discussed fauxhawks or the bane of acne. Some discussed shoe brands and sports teams. They dribbled basketballs and even chased girls in a game of manhunt, just to get close to them.

Well, most boys played.

MT liked girls too, but he knew that he didn't stand a chance of drawing anyone's eye. Not when he had a body like Uncle Reardon's, whose name reminded MT of the word "rear-end."



In his room, he sat with his creative mind. Resting on his back, he daydreamed, drew pictures, and wrote stories about the Tuskegee Airmen or his favorite comic book superhero, Blackbird, who lit up movie theaters with his ability to stand on the edge of buildings, soar through the sky, and land punches that frequently rocked skyscrapers and super villains.

On this day, while he daydreamed, he ate a bag of Pizza Scraps and drank two bottles of Jongo Juice.

When the juice was gone, MT rose and went downstairs. While his mother graded papers, he found a large bag of chips, which he dug into.



"MT," his mother called.

"Yeah?" he asked.

She stared at him. "Maybe you could do without those chips."

"But they're crab flavored."

"They'll taste just as good some other time."

He ate one more and slowly rolled the bag up.

His mother said, "How was your day?"

MT shrugged. He was too embarrassed to divulge the truth. Before school, standing in line and waiting to enter the large building, Aaron "Tick" Tickford walked up

and mimicked barfing on MT's shoulder. All day, they shared classes together, and every day Tick tortured him.

That day, laughing, Tick had sharpened his brow and said, "Empty Pit. Ya got a perfect name for yourself. You're just an empty pit hauling around a billion pounds of whale blubber, right? It's like a shark that eats everything. Cut you open and there'd probably be a dog inside . . . a dog and like hundreds of Swarson's Donut Rounds, some Kentucky Fried Handcakes, and boxes of Coco Shortbread Cereal. Am I right?"

MT wanted to vanish, to hide, which, at his size, was hard to do.



"No, that's not right," he whispered.

Tick said, "Ya wanna I give you a good beat down?"

"No," MT said.

"So then, say, 'I'm disgusting.' MT Pitt is disgusting."

MT shook his head. "I can't."

A girl named Darcy, standing beside MT, said, "Don't be a jerk, Tick."

"Say it, MT," Tick demanded, ignoring Darcy.

MT mumbled, "I'm disgusting?"

"You're right," Tick told him. "You're right, man!"

MT swallowed. He stepped slowly from the pantry and studied his mother. "Today was okay," he lied. All day, Tick's friends had also made him say, "I'm disgusting." He was their piñata.

MT put the bag of chips on the counter and went upstairs.





In his room, MT worked on his homework. When he finished, he looked out at the afternoon. He saw friends running around next door. Down below, he heard someone yell, “Touched a piece of your hair!”

Someone hollered back, “Hair doesn’t count!”

MT peered out the window for a while, wishing that he could act like a kid along with them. For the first time in a long time, he wanted to do what his friends were doing, even if what they were doing was a form of exercise.

Chapter 3

Downstairs, MT pulled on his jacket and left out the front door. Passing down the steps, his knees hurt, but he ignored them. He walked across the green, green grass and stood at the edge of his property, where he watched his friends play some sort of game, probably manhunt. The wind blew and leaves swirled down in a shower of colors.



When Angelo, Bootsy, Chester, and Lydia noticed MT, they stopped. “Hey, MT.” Nervous, MT nodded.

Angelo told him, “You never come outside, man.”

“Mostly I don’t,” MT agreed.

“Do you want to join or something?” Lydia asked him.

He nodded. “Kind of.”

Bootsy said, “Are you a really slow runner, MT?”

“Probably,” he answered. The year before, at school, a coach had forced the whole class

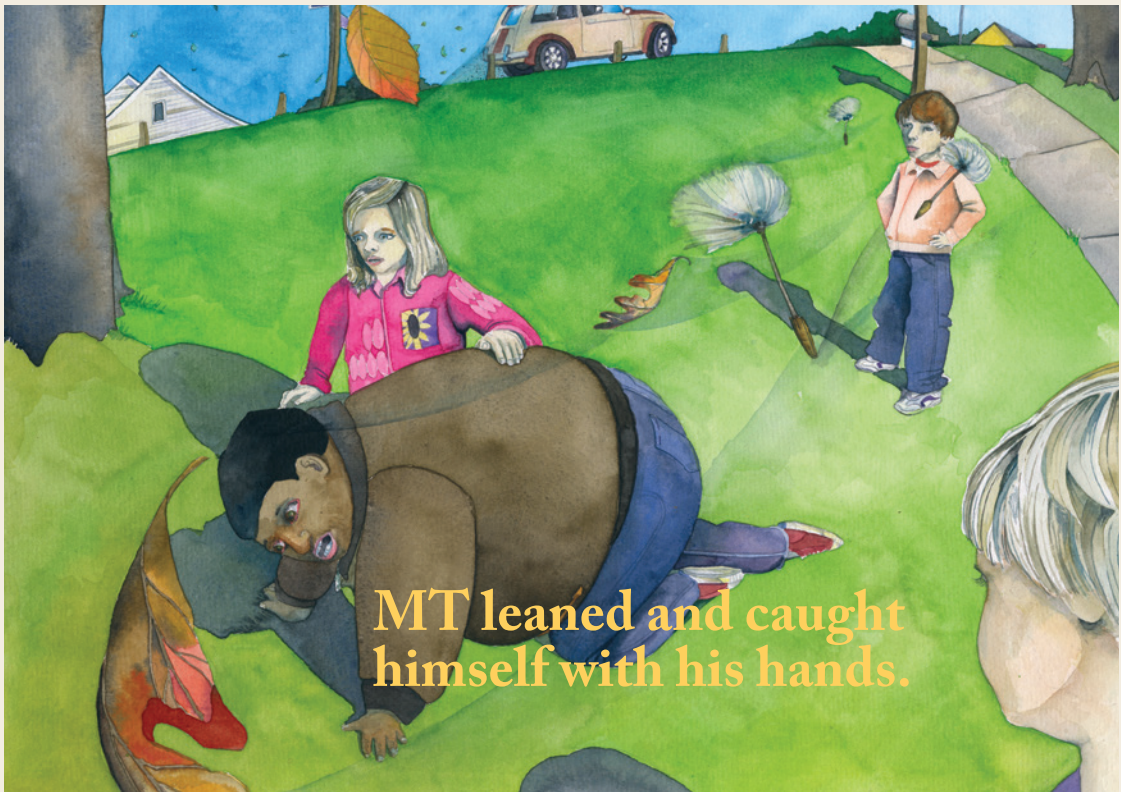
to race a few times around the gym, and MT had been second to last in front of Harold Mincer, who'd been on crutches. While running, too, his knees had felt like they were going to explode like hand grenades stuck beneath the joints.

Lydia reached over and touched Chester. "You're it!"

Chester swung about and touched Angelo. "You're it now!"

Angelo reached over and touched MT. "MT's it!" he hollered, and ran.

Heart pounding, MT turned about and rushed after Bootsy. MT chased until he couldn't catch his breath, till it felt like string had been tied tight around his windpipe. Worried he might faint, he stopped. Slowly, he sank to his knees. Inside MT's chest, his heart banged like a flat tire on a rolling car. Meanwhile, his pulse knocked so hard that his head bobbed up and down.



Scared, Chester said, "You sick?"

MT shook his head. "I'm not."

Angelo bent down. "You gonna barf?"

MT croaked, "Maybe."

MT toppled onto his side. He was tired of feeling like he wanted to vanish quick as snow on a skillet. He was tired of being who he was, of school and sports and fatness. Life hurt like a deep scrape that was always new.





Chapter 3

At school, MT could draw the superhero Blackbird better than anyone. He thought of dozens of new Blackbird poses and stories that were usually better than in the real comic books.



In art class that day, kids asked MT to draw pictures of Blackbird fighting his enemy Tomcat.

MT smiled while he did it.

Lydia told MT, "You always give Blackbird the best face." Everyone agreed.

Later, in language arts, they read *Old Yeller*. In the book, a yellow dog dies. When the dog died in the story, Aaron "Tick" Tickford laughed, which made MT cringe. Tick was just mean, mean and hard, the sort of hard that affected his entire body, including his fists, which looked like two stones when he balled them up. After the teacher got Tick quieted down, she instructed the class to write their own stories. MT liked to write about Blackbird. Once, he'd written a story where Blackbird traveled back in time and became a Tuskegee Airman. This time, he

wrote how Blackbird lost his pet humming bird named Buzzer.

The teacher, Mrs. Gouge, was so touched by his story that she read it to the class.

Tick looked as if he wanted to kill him.

Lydia nearly cried.

Mrs. Gouge turned around and said to MT, "MT, please consider putting that story in the school paper. It's very touching."

MT nodded. "Yes, ma'am."

After school, MT cautiously struggled up the steps to the third floor, where the school's newspaper office was located. He was worried he might run into Tick. At the top, MT caught his breath, which took a few minutes. Then he shuffled quickly through the office door.



"Mr. Wiley?" MT said to the newspaper's teacher.

Mr. Wiley looked up. "Yes?"

"Ah, sir, in class today, Mrs. Gouge told me I should give this to you so that you might put it in the paper next week."

"I'll give it a look," Mr. Wiley said.

MT nodded. He didn't want to seem too excited or hopeful.

Nervous, MT crept back down the stairwell, once more fearful of Tick. MT was a snake, a mouse, a dog hiding from a catcher. It was humiliating and terrifying, creating strange and terrible, tornadic feelings inside of him, wherein he hated Tick, himself, school, and his dead-end life.

When he got home, he was annoyed. MT went upstairs and rested on his bed. After a few deep breaths, he started to imagine that he was a Tuskegee Airman. No one could fly better. When an enemy aircraft roared out from behind a cloud, MT's plane climbed, spiraled, and turned. They stalked each other. They hunted. In time, MT did a loop de loop and fired: Rata-tat-tat! Rata-tat-tat-tat-tat!

The enemy plane fell away, trailing dark smoke. And, as it spiraled downwards,

MT recognized the pilot. It was Tick, terrified and about to die, his mouth open wide in panic, which looked a bit like he was going to eat the biggest sandwich in the world.

MT was the winner. It was great. He wasn't too fat. He wasn't too heavy.

MT took a few more deep breaths. He wished he was that brave, but he wasn't. He got up and went downstairs. He was hungry again. It wasn't easy flying a plane.

He found chocolate milk in the refrigerator.

From the pantry, he took handfuls of Alligator





Chapter 5

The next day before school, Tick spotted MT schlepping his book bag up the stairs to the front doors. Like a hound after a rabbit, Tick went after MT, catching him in roughly seven seconds.

Shocked, MT's big chest heaved up and down. He wasn't sure what Tick planned to do.

Students stopped to watch but know one did anything. MT could see two girls watching. He shut his eyes so as not to see them seeing him get his face caved in.

"Say you're a dung licker," Tick demanded loudly, his bad breath clouding MT's vision.

MT squeaked. "Ah... no, okay? Not in front of everyone. Please, Tick?"

"Say you're a dung licker. Now, fatty."

Shamed, MT looked down.

"Say it, lumpy."

MT swallowed and studied Tick's fist, wrapped in the collar of his t-shirt. "I'm ... a dung licker. Okay?"

Tick laughed. He said, "I know you are."

Then, suddenly, Ms. Crystal, the vice principal had a hand on Tick's shoulder. "What's going on here?" she asked.

Shocked, Tick let MT go. He spun about. "I didn't do anything," he told her, raising his hands to show her he wasn't guilty.

"Is that so?" Ms. Crystal asked.

"Yeah. I mean, MT called me ... something."

Ms. Crystal said, "What did he call you?"

MT watched Ms. Crystal's face and the back of Tick's head. He couldn't speak.

"He ... called me a ... a wanker."

Ms. Crystal shifted her eyes only MT. "MT?" she said.

Scared of Tick seeking revenge, MT nodded. "I said it," he rasped, feeling like a donkey, like he was being steered by someone, like he had a bit in his mouth and straps to force him to go where he didn't want to.



Chapter 6



That afternoon, after detention, MT walked home. Entering his house, he went straight to the pantry. In front of a box of Choco Cream Cakes, MT hesitated. Then he devoured four. Finished, he plunged his hands into a bag of barbecue flavored corn chips. It was as if he hadn't eaten in a month.

MT didn't want to be over-weight, but he liked the taste of food. He also hated feeling hungry. Being hungry was like having an animal chew softly on his stomach. Being hungry felt like he was getting eaten.

He turned on the television. There was an exercise show on. Agitated, he turned it off.

He walked around the room, stopped, and looked at the floor. He lifted his head and looked at the ceiling. He wanted to talk to someone.

He walked up and down the front hallway of his house, feeling lonely. Then he took the house keys from a hook and went outside. Slowly, he walked to Angelo's house. He knocked. Angelo and Bootsy answered.

Angelo said, "Hey, MT."

Bootsy said, "Hurry, man, we're playing video games?"

MT went inside.

Angelo and Bootsy rushed back to the den, circled around to the television and picked up their controllers. Bootsy said, "Can you talk this afternoon, MT?"

He answered. "Yeah."

Angelo asked, "You wanna tell us why you said stuff to Tick?"

MT said, "I didn't."

Angelo nodded. "We didn't think so. Last year, he did the same thing to Bootsy."

"He did," Bootsy admitted. "He's a jerk."

"This year, he hates me for some reason," MT told them.

"It's cause you're fat," Angelo told him. "Last year he bothered Bootsy before he grew four inches."

MT said, "To be like Blackbird, how much weight do you think I have to lose?"

Bootsy spun around. He studied MT. "Hmmm. Turn sideways. Now frontways. Okay," he said. He held up three fingers. "You've got to lose a lot."



MT said, "Yeah. I wish I wasn't made like my Uncle Reardon."

Bootsy asked, "Is he fat, too?"

MT nodded.

Troubled, MT went home. Entering the house, his father said, "Ms. Crystal called. She thinks you were bullied before school."

MT blinked.

"She called your mother, and your mother called me." His father stroked his goatee. "Ms. Crystal thinks you're an easy target."

MT said, "I'm big, you mean?"

"It's okay," his father said. "You're like Uncle Reardon."

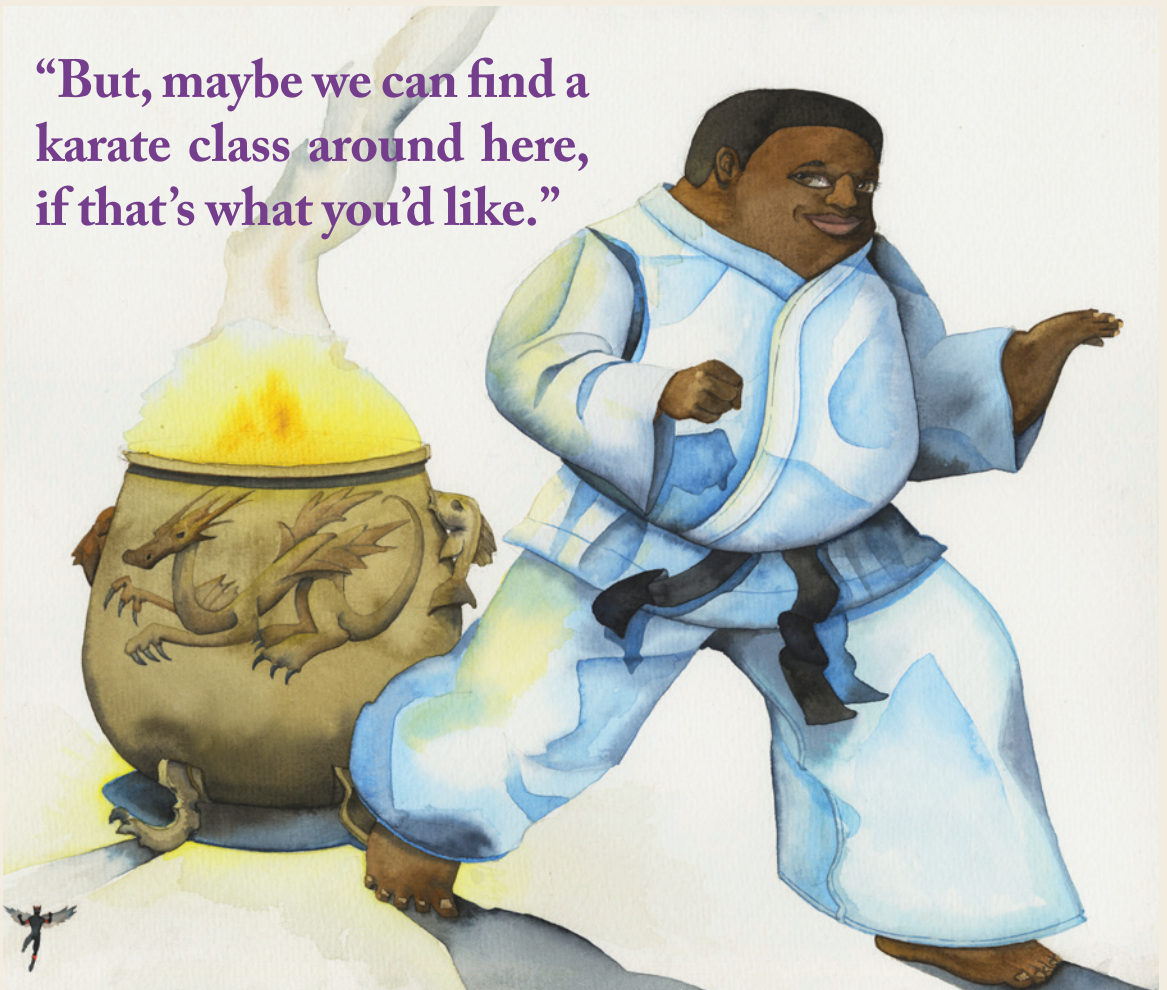
MT imagined himself a walrus, scooting on his stomach.

MT scowled. "You know what. From now on, I'll only eat chips and not as many cookies." He lifted a hand like he was going to take oath. "Dad, I've also got a good idea, too. I can do like Blackbird. I can go to China and train with a karate expert. I could learn to crack boards with my feet."

"You're not going to China," Mr. Pitt said. "But, maybe we can find a karate class around here, if that's what you'd like."



**"But, maybe we can find a
karate class around here,
if that's what you'd like."**



Chapter 7

The next day, on the way to school, MT was hungry. He wondered if he was actually starving. For dessert the night before, he'd had one dish of chocolate frozen yogurt. For breakfast that morning, instead of Sugar Coated Honey Balls, his favorite cereal, he had a normal bowl of Lightly Sweetened Wheat Slabs.

Lightly Sweetened Wheat Slabs!

MT was starving for good tastes.

In the window of the car, he looked at his reflection. He didn't look as if he'd lost a single pound since the night before. Outside, birds flew. A lady walked her dog. It was nice. But there he was looking back at himself, wishing he was someone else, wishing he was a lion, a carnivorous cat that could pummel Tick like Tick was a big cat toy.

In front of school, he got out.

Lydia, Angelo, and Bootsy walked past. "Hey, MT," they said.

MT barely said, "Hey." He slumped as he walked to his locker. He began stripping off his sweatshirt, and Tick came up from behind. "Hey, Empty Pit."





MT's lips quivered. He couldn't give that away. He'd die of starvation. "I can't."

Frowning, Tick whispered, "I'll ring your fat neck. I'll do it, Empty Pit."

MT was so scared, he couldn't budge. He was a frozen fish.

Of course, Tick thought MT was refusing to move.

"I'll choke you like a duck," Tick promised.

MT plunged a hand into a pocket. As he did, though, he thought about his heroes and knew that they wouldn't give Tick their money. He was sure that nothing ever scared Blackbird or a Tuskegee Airmen.

MT held his hand in his pocket like a bear trap held his fingers so that he couldn't pull them from his pocket. Then, finally, he removed his hand, and it was empty. He was tired of feeling like he was going down a river in a raft. He was tired of holding on for dear life instead of steering, of washing up on Tick's rocky shores.



Voice wobbly, MT said, "You can't have my lunch money. I won't give it."

Tick said, "You're a comedian, MT. Now hand it over."

MT shook his head.

Tick leaned forward, and said,

"MT, what's your problem?"

"Nothing."

The classroom bell rang.

MT adjusted his book bag, which, due to his nerves being frayed, felt like a hot air balloon. He said, "I got to go to class now, Tick."

Confused by MT's defiance, Tick nodded.







Chapter 8

MT admired the way the Tuskegee Airmen swarmed for battle in the sky. They did what they needed to do, the same way as Blackbird. Blackbird always did brave things.

Of course, MT felt he had never been very brave. At least he couldn't ever remember being brave.

He wished he was different.

He was a worrier, not a warrior.

He worried that Tick might want revenge for the lunch money thing. Therefore, he was careful in the hallways. He was careful on the stairs. In class, he was careful to sit on the other side of the room from Tick. And when the class bell rang, he was careful to be the first kid out of the classroom.

Blackbird wouldn't have put up with the situation for two seconds. He'd have whipped

out his dangerous throwing stars, which were known to comic book fans for cutting rope, sticking in steel buildings (somehow), and slicing through body armor. Blackbird would've probably stuck a star right in Tick's forehead.

No matter, MT put up with avoiding Tick because he felt like he had to. Then catastrophe struck. The sky fell. The train went off the tracks. The dog was caught by the catcher.



In art class, Ms. Wilson broke people into groups of two,
placing Aaron Tickford
with MT Pitt.



MT nearly fainted.

Tick peered at him wickedly.

Ms. Wilson said, “I want each person to figure out how to draw their favorite thing, like a car or a phone on this one piece of paper I’m giving your team to share. The thing is, your favorite things need to overlap correctly, even if they are opposite, like a shoe and a tank. You can use markers to color them in or you can leave them in pencil. But both images need to work together on the page.”

Students got up and switched places

Feeling ill, MT turned away as Tick crossed the room. If he had glanced just once, however, he would’ve seen how nervous Tick looked. Tick had good reason to be nervous, too. Tick couldn’t draw a wobbly line, a bad circle, a stick-figure. Whereas MT, he was the Leonardo da Vinci of the class. MT could make a box look good.

To sound tough, Tick said, “MT, I suppose you’ll draw something where a pencil sticks out of someone’s rear-end?”

MT didn’t speak.

“What’cha gonna draw, idiot?”

MT muttered, “Blackbird.”

Tick said, “Butthead, that’s what I’m drawing.”

MT stared. His focus went in and out. He wasn’t “not” going to draw Blackbird so that Tick could make an ugly picture of him. MT loved Blackbird. He had three t-shirts with his favorite superhero on the front. MT rubbed his small hands together. Nervous, he said, “Blackbird’s one of my favorite things to draw. So, I gotta draw him.”

"No you don't."

MT stared. Finally, he said, "I'm gonna."

MT didn't look at Tick. Instead, he started to work on the piece of paper Ms. Wilson had handed out. Right away, he got Blackbird's feet so that they seemed to be stepping. He also got the superhero's arms so that they looked like thick muscles.

Tick watched him, scared. Horrified. His turn was next. Then he said, "Are you trying to make me look bad?"

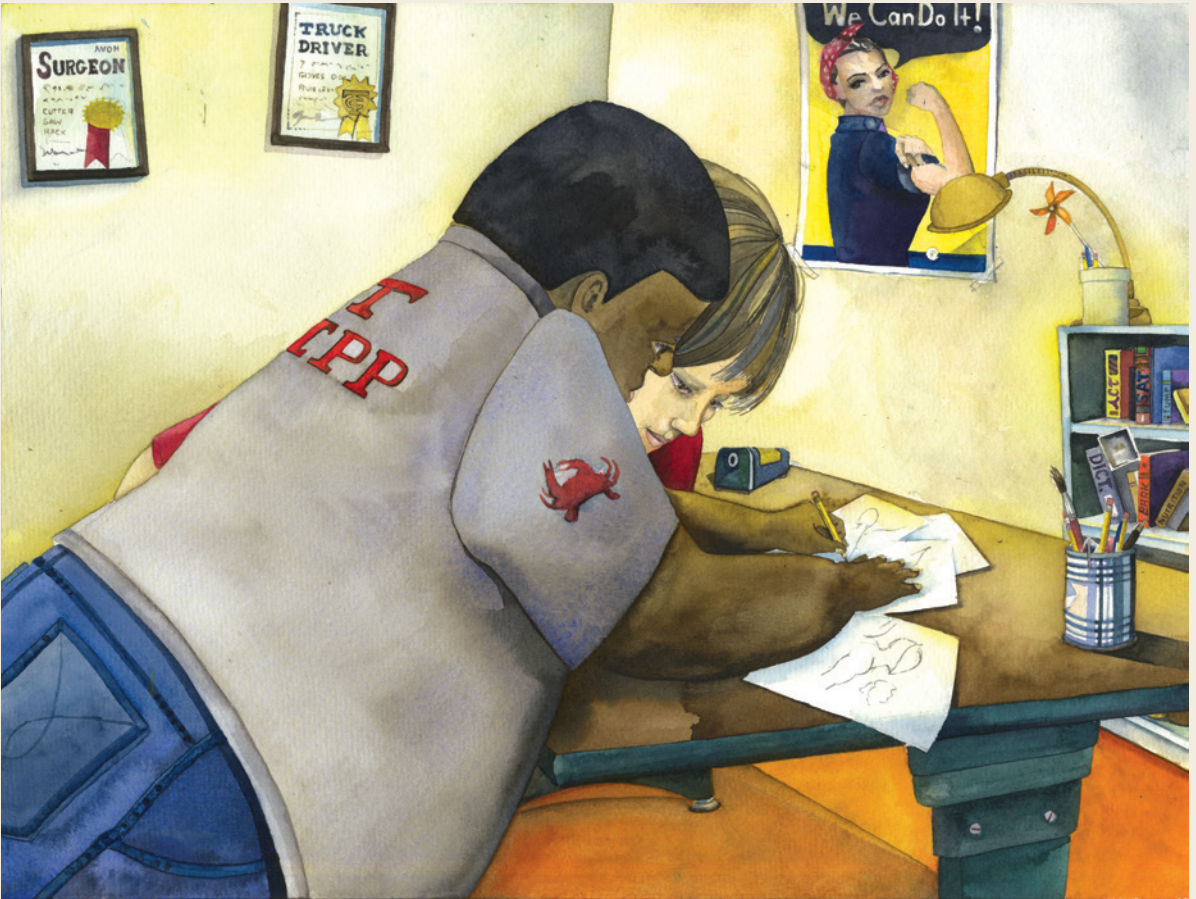
"No," said MT softly, but he kind of was.

"So," Tick finally mumbled, "How do you do that?"

"You gotta watch," MT told him, feeling, for a second, bad for Tick.

Tick said, "So how do you know the way his head works like that?"

"Because I look at other peoples' heads."



"Oh."

MT worked. As he started on one of Blackbird's hands, he said, "You gotta stop being mean to me."

Tick scowled. "I'm not. I just have fun," he lied.

"It's not fun for me."

Tick shrugged.

MT stopped drawing. Drawing Blackbird so well made him feel strong.

"If you do it more, I'll tell every teacher in the school. I will."



Clenching his teeth, Tick said, "If you do, I'll punch your fat face in."

MT hated the idea of having his face punched in, but he whispered, "If you punch my face in all of the teachers will know what you did, and they'll hate you."

"So."

Feeling a little like Blackbird, MT said, "They'll hate you like people hate bullies. And . . . worse, they'll call your house. They'll talk to your parents about the way you are. They'll all talk and they'll all know."

Tick looked away, made hesitant by something. Finally, he said, "I don't care. You've gotten stale anyway. You're a total bore, now." Then he proceeded to draw something only vaguely human and hardly heroic.



Chapter 8

For the next few weeks, Aaron Tickford mostly left MT Pitt alone. For MT, it felt like he'd crawled through the desert.

Tick went on to bother a boy named Curtis, who had two different sized feet. One big. One small. It was a tough situation for Curtis.

As for MT, he didn't exactly know what got Tick to leave him alone. Was it defiance, his threat, or was he really just stale? Was it one of the three, two of the three, or three of the three? Could other things have worked? He didn't know.

And he didn't ask.

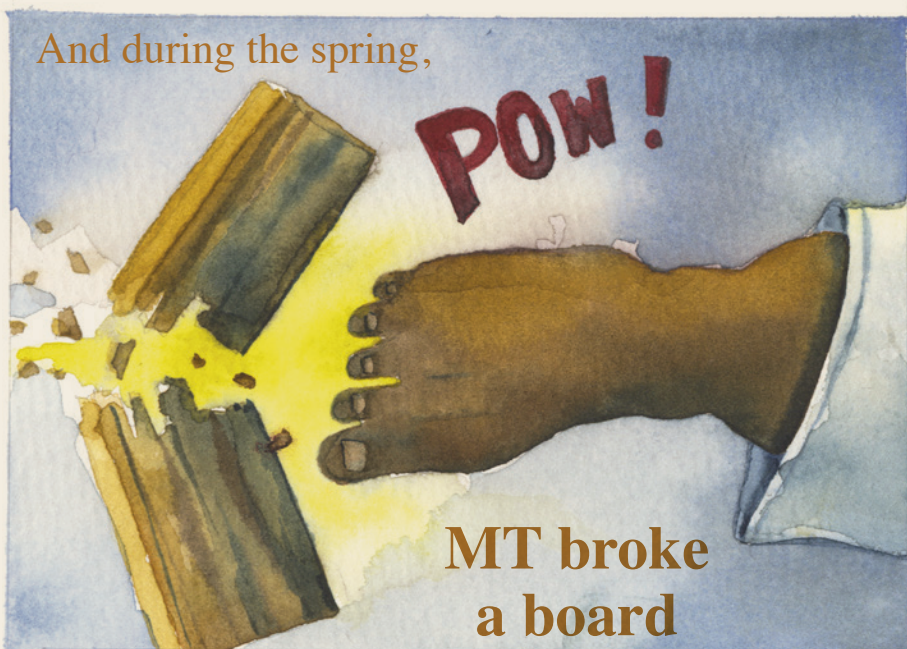
Tick had made his life terrible. During the worst of it, MT had disliked himself and school and even being home. Tick had caused his imagination to waste time inventing stories about revenge.

In the afternoons after school, MT's parents arranged for him to take karate lessons. And slowly, something happened. He began to chase his friends without dropping to the ground. He began to become the kid he wanted to be. MT even helped Curtis get Tick to stop hassling him by secretly divulging exactly what MT had said to get Tick to make him quit.

So Tick proceeded to bother a boy named Homer, who was so thin, rumor had it he used his dog's collar for a belt. The thing is, Homer didn't threaten to tell his teachers and the principle and his own parents. He just went ahead and told immediately. And Tick got in-school suspension for two weeks. Tick was flattened. Tick was de-ticked.

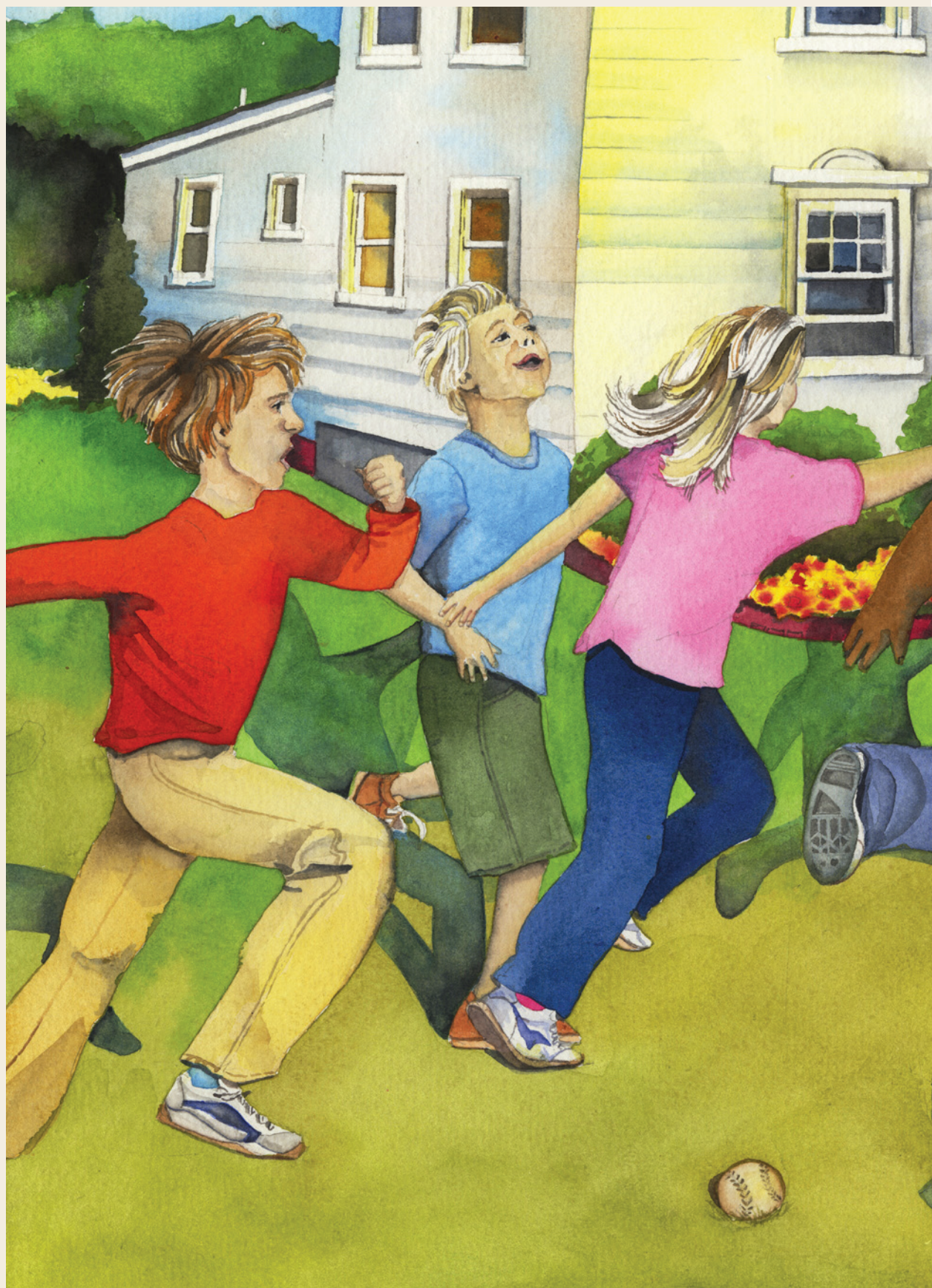


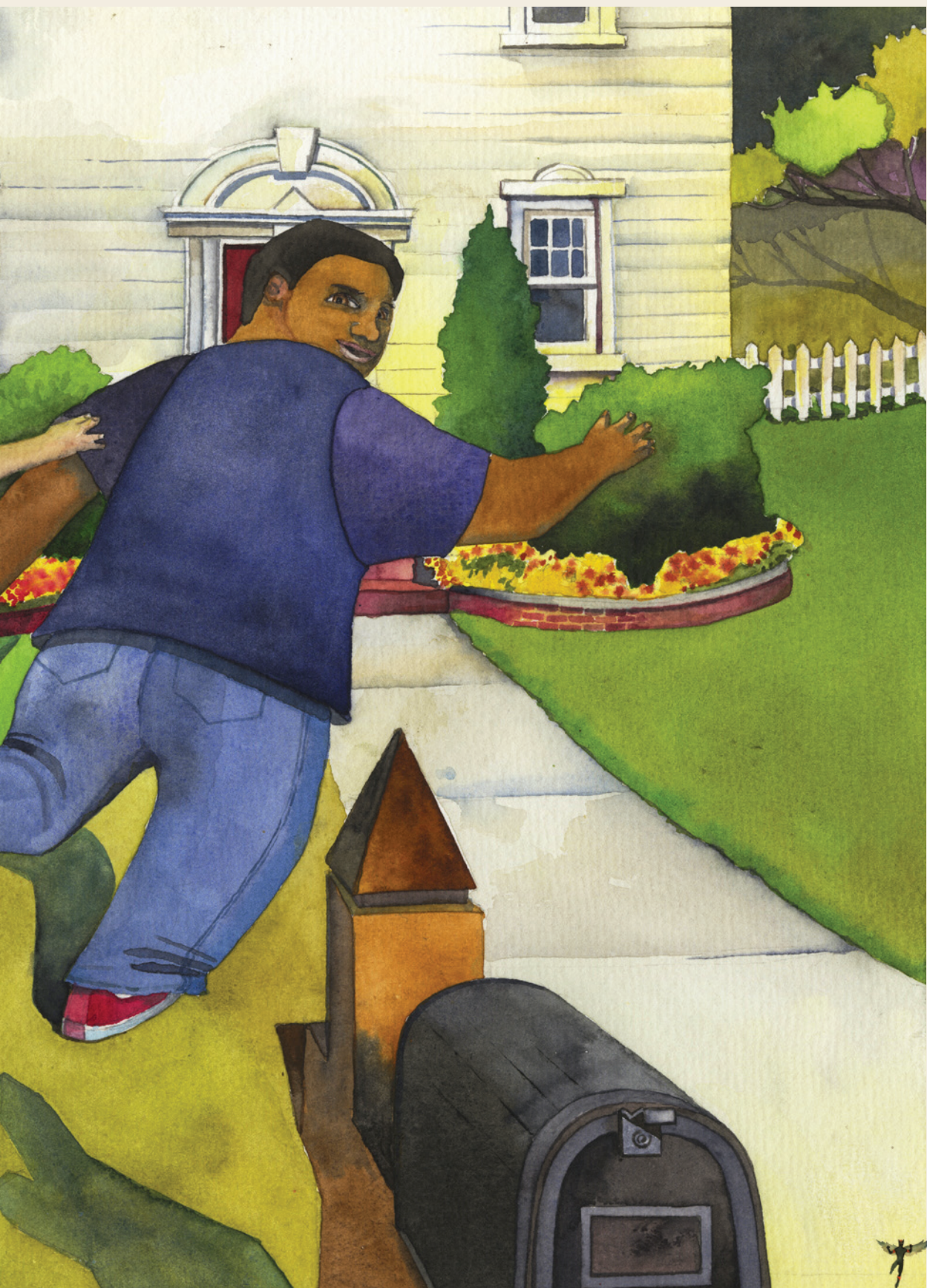
And during the spring,



**MT broke
a board
with his foot.**











J. Scott Fuqua is the author of four multi award-winning young adult novels (*The Reappearance of Sam Webber*, *Darby*, *The Willoughby Spit Wonder*, *King of the Pygmies*). He has also written two highly acclaimed literary novels (*In the Wake of the Boatman*, *Gone and Back Again*) and the award-winning graphic novel *In the Shadow of Edgar*

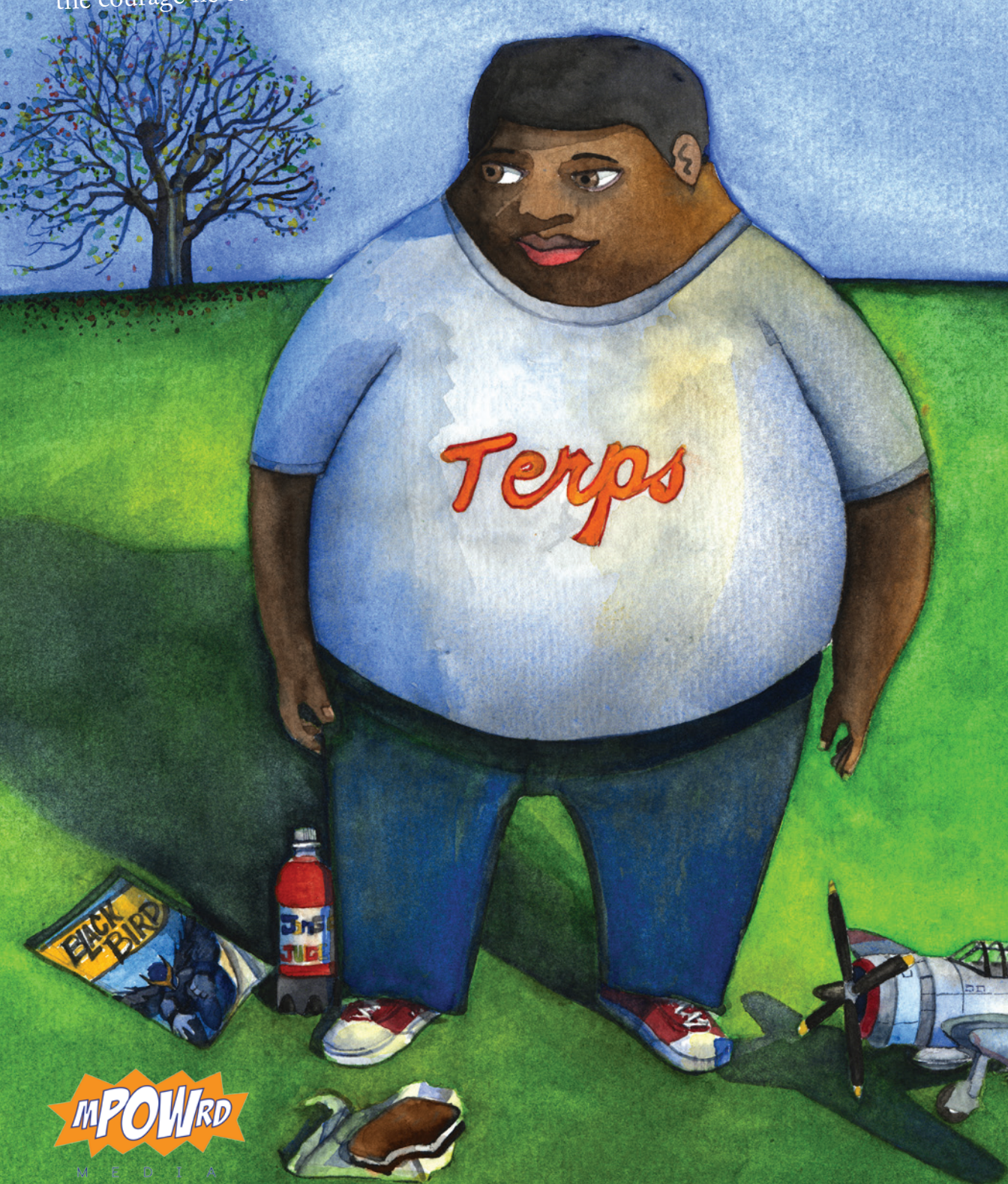
Allan Poe. Winter 2013 will see the publication of the multimedia project *Medusa's Daughter*, which is coming out as a novel, graphic novel, and graphic novella, and in all ebook formats. He's penned and illustrated two books on the history of architecture and a children's book on the history of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. For elementary students, he wrote the graphic chapter book *Catie and Josephine*, illustrated, and created *The Adventures of MT Pitt*, and *The Synagogue Speaks*. His most recent children's book, *Calvert the Raven in the Battle of Baltimore*, was the Library of Congress National Book Festival Selection for Maryland as well as Maryland's Center for the Book's 2013 Selection for kids. *Calvert the Raven* has been written into the Maryland State elementary school social studies curriculum and Fuqua has been invited to be a primary speaker at the Middle States Council for Social Studies in February. Currently, he is writing and illustrating new books for kids. His fifth YA novel, *The Mystery of the Greaser Hotel*, is a highly anticipated gothic adventure with the unusual twist of incorporating 115 illustrations throughout the story. It will arrive on shelves in March. He writes living history plays for the Jewish Museum of Maryland and the Maryland Historical Society, two of which were honored at the National Theater in Washington DC last spring. He has won three Maryland State Arts Council writing awards and teaches writing and illustration as the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA).







MT Pitt is a creative, talented, and imaginative young man whose daydream life provides escape from the torment he faces at school at the hand of school bully, Aaron "Tick" Tickford. Through his dealings with Tick and the courage he summons within himself, he finds his voice...**and himself**.



M P O W R D
M E D I A