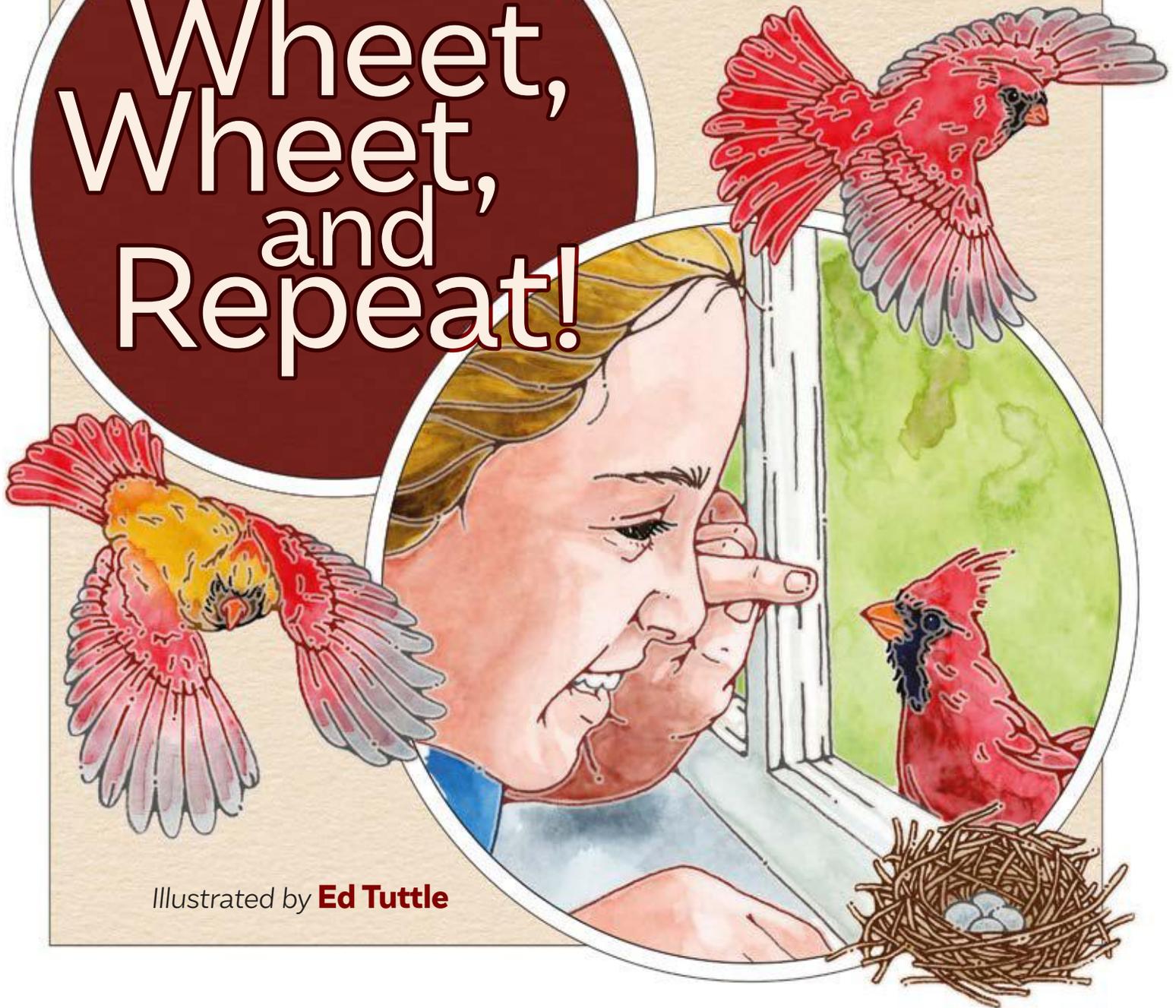


Story by **Marianne Paidas**

Wheet, Wheet, and Repeat!



Illustrated by **Ed Tuttle**

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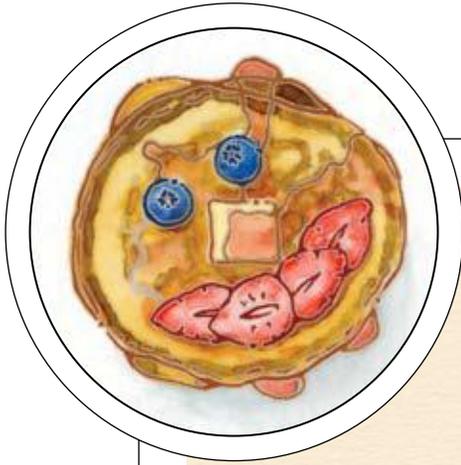


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To my
Aunt Serena Rose (Re),
a gentle soul
who will always be
my muse,
my best friend,
and my kindred spirit.



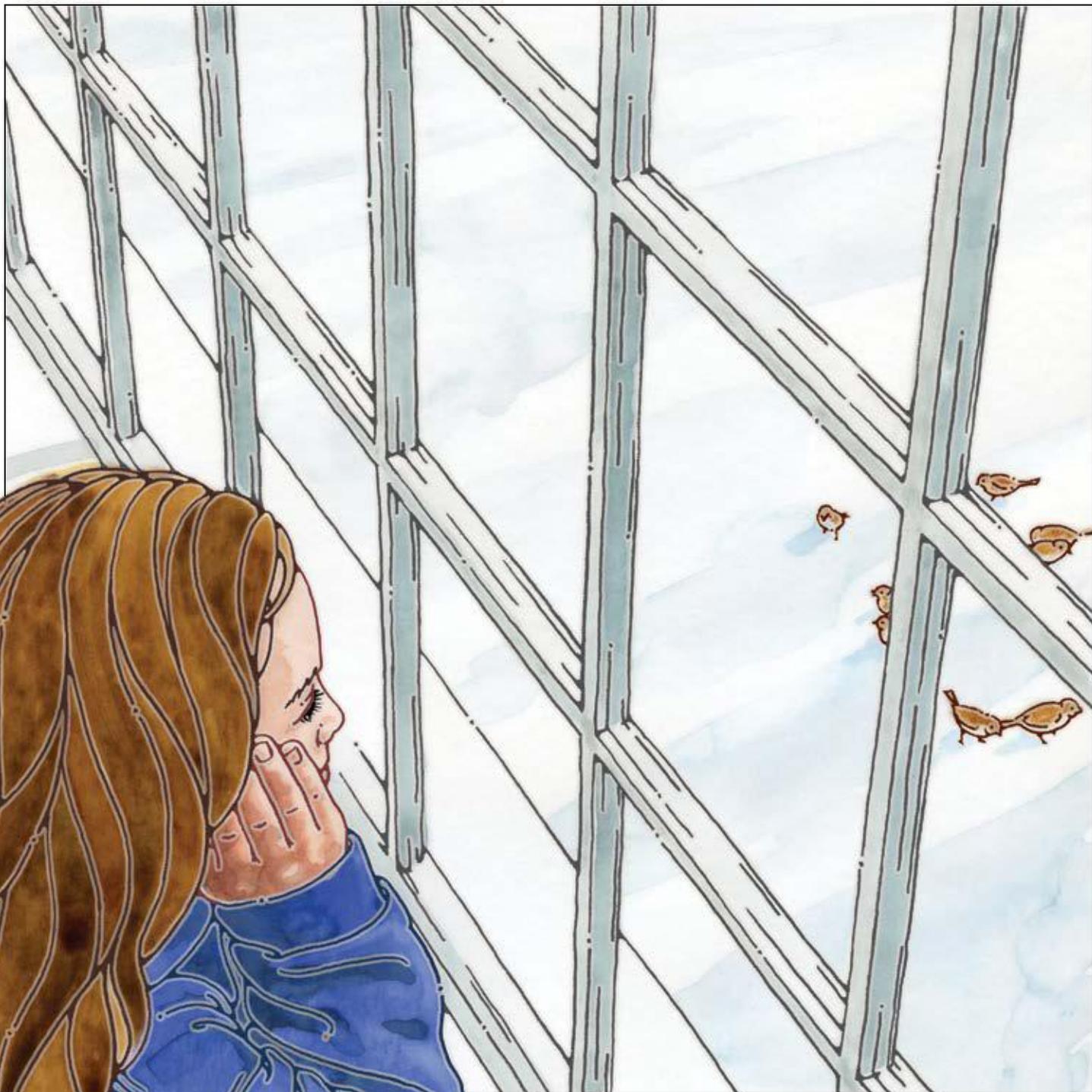
Sarina sits quietly at the kitchen window as the first light of morning pours in, chasing away the shadows.

Breakfast is *nearly* ready,
the dog *nearly* fed, and Sarina,
who is eight years and two days old,
nearly rewarded for her patience.

Her birthday gift, a bird feeder, painted the lushest green of summer clover, hangs on a rusty hook just outside the sprawling panes of glass. Sarina's unblinking eyes are fixed on it.

"Sit perfectly still," her mother says, which seems odd amidst the kitchen's noisy hubbub.

But, just as her breakfast of pancakes with blueberry eyes and strawberry smiles is set on the table—







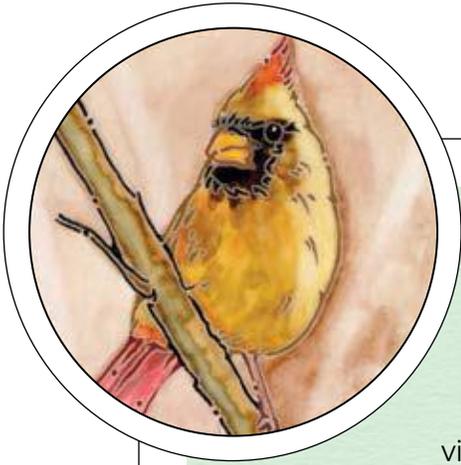
—a burst of red appears!

“Mama, come look!” Sarina exclaims.

“A cardinal. He’s a cardinal, Sarina,” her mother says, slowly tiptoeing towards the window.

His feathers are the color of Nonni’s tomato sauce; his eyes are pin dots, black as the tar of her driveway; his carrot-like beak sticks out from a bandit’s mask.

He swoops in, lands on the feeder, and begins to
pick,
pick,
pick
at the sunflower seeds.



He nibbles only a few seeds when another feathered visitor arrives and perches on a holly bush near the feeder.

Sarina freezes like a statue.

“His mate, Sarina,” says her mother. “She wears more practical plumes of rusty brown to protect her from harm.”

Suddenly, the male cardinal stops eating,
scoops up a seed or two,
flies over to the female,
gives her the morsels,
then returns to the feeder.







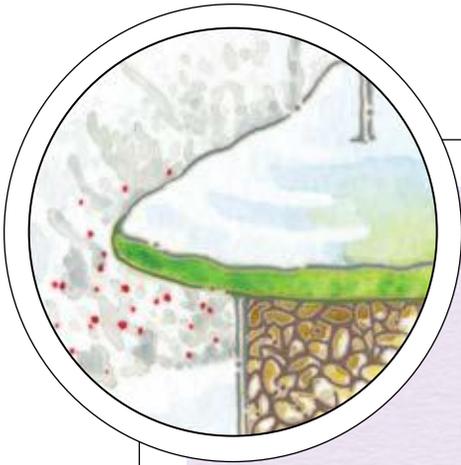
Sarina watches as his back-and-forth behavior continues and is captivated by the kindness of the cardinal. The male is full of purpose, doing what comes naturally, his piercing eyes making it clear that nothing will stop him.

WHY?

Her mother answers the question before Sarina asks it aloud.

“The word ‘cardinal’ means important. Cardinals are more than just beautiful songbirds. They can teach us about cooperation, trust, and respect just by watching them. A pretty important job, don’t you think?”

Sarina nods her head enthusiastically.



Outside the window, the two birds finish their morning meal.

A late March snow has fallen; the vibrant colors of the bird feeder, the cardinals, and the holly berries stand out against the soft white blanket.

The cardinals fly away, but not before announcing their departure with a song:

“What cheer,
what cheer,
wheet,
wheet,
wheet!”



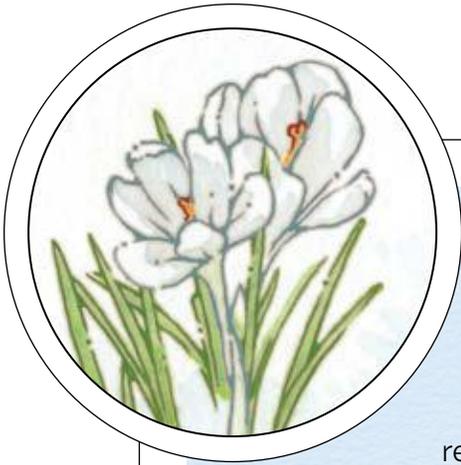




From within, her mother's song,
"Sarrriiiiiinnnaaa!"
calls her to the table and the breakfast that still has a few
remaining streams of steam rising from it.

A smiling pancake face stares up at her, and she pokes at it with
her fork, thinking of the cardinals again.

Why does the male feed the female? She's perfectly capable of
feeding herself. Brave, bold, and beautiful. Maybe he loves her,
like mama loves me, and is just trying to say, "I will always take
care of you."



In the weeks that follow, spring solidly takes hold, and winter becomes a memory. The cardinals return every morning, the same ritual taking place.

Seed by seed,
beak to beak,
the songs they sing ever louder,
their bond ever stronger.

One day, Sarina tries to get their attention by tapping gently on the window. Watchful, inquisitive eyes look back at her for just a moment. Then, like before, the pair take flight, disappearing over the budding trees and into the sun-streaked sky.

“Please, come back, cardinals, please come back,”
Sarina begs silently.





But, the next day, they do not return.
And the next day, and the next day, and the next...

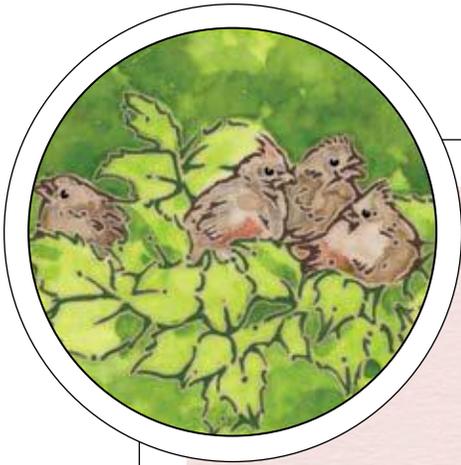
A sad Sarina thinks perhaps it was her tapping
the day before that scared them away.

“No, Sarina,” her mother soothingly whispers. “It was just their
time to move on. Their nest sits in one of those distant trees, and
I think they have another important job to do.” Sarina wonders
what that job might be.

Time passes; the buds on the trees have turned into delicate
little leaves that look like squirrel ears, and Sarina’s bird feeder
hosts an array of birds: big ones, little ones, blue ones, black ones,
yellow ones, and spotted ones.

Sarina watches from her usual spot, enjoying the multicolored
cluster of fluttering wings, diving and darting about.



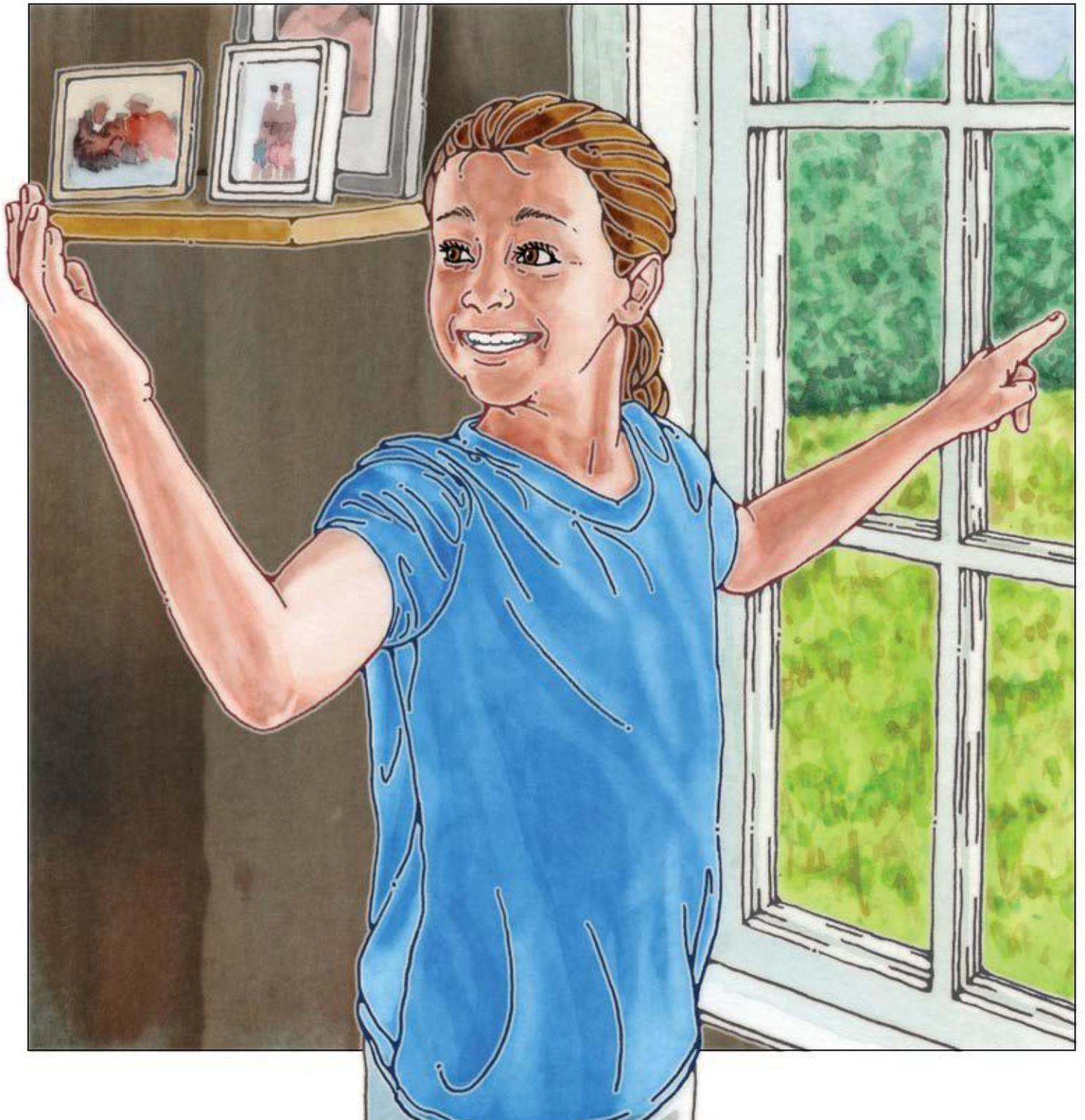


Then, she sees them.

The cardinals are back!

This time, both perch on the feeder eating vigorously. Her eyes dart over to the holly bush where four baby birds are chirping cheerfully as they steady themselves on the branch.

Sarina's mother calls them fledglings.







“Well, what do you know, they are now a brood,
a family of six,” she adds.

Sarina smiles and watches as the familiar ritual begins again,
only this time, both cardinals
pick,
pick,
pick the seeds,
and feed their young beak to beak.

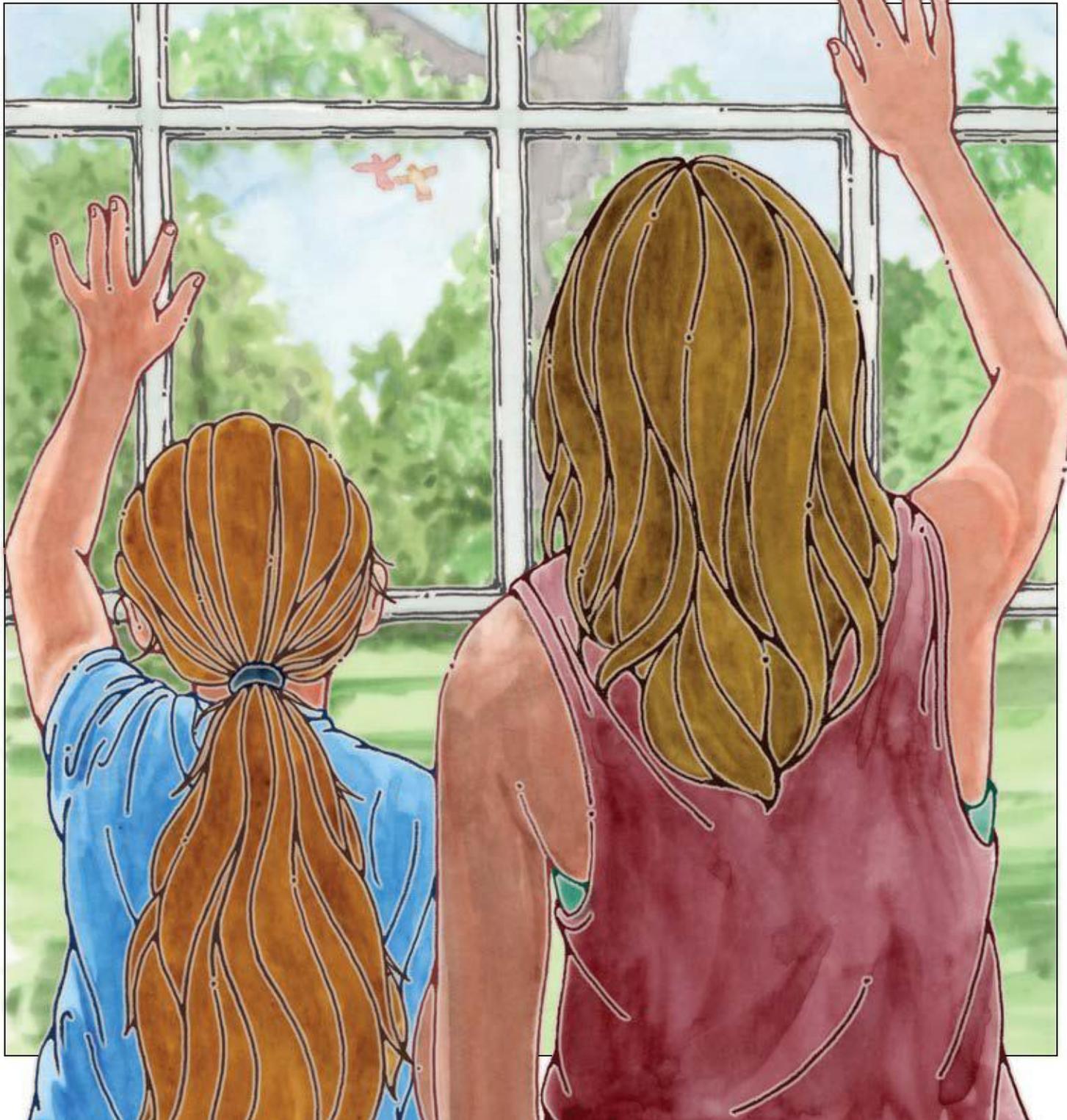
The babies twitter, skitter, and bounce about like ping-pong balls,
their mouths open, waiting expectantly.



“Once the fledglings are old enough to feed themselves,” her mother continues, “they too, will find mates. Remember that simple act of kindness we talked about? These young ones will pass it on.”

“Wheet, wheet, and repeat!” Sarina quips, and mother and daughter laugh as they watch the family fly away.

Both of them are thinking the same thing. How lucky they are to have been part of the cardinals' journey; how grateful they are to have learned such a valuable lesson.







Sarina secretly hopes that when the babies grow up they will bring their broods to visit her bird feeder, the most perfect birthday gift, hanging on the rusty hook outside those sprawling panes of glass.



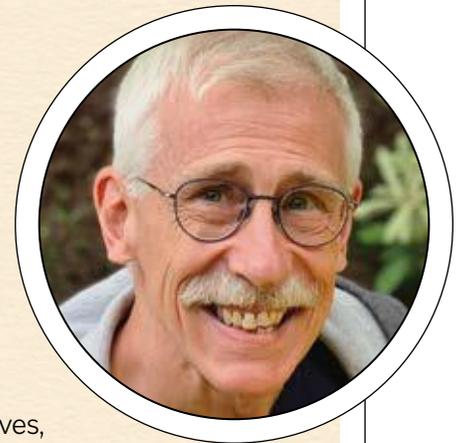
When first-time author Marianne Paidas was eight-years-old, she and her Aunt Re would feed all the birds that came to visit in her backyard.

Fun facts abounded; but more importantly, the lessons that nature can teach humans about kindness led to the desire to write this book. An English teacher for many years, Marianne always emphasized the themes of kindness and empathy found in literature.

What better way to reach children than writing a book about her beloved birds and what can be learned from them? Always a steward, Marianne, who is a wife of forty-one years, mother of three, and meems of two, raises future service dogs for Canine Companions. Her newest pup, Delphine, lays by her side as she types.

Ed Tuttle has been working as a graphic designer/illustrator since 1979, and in 2001, started his own design/illustration studio, eklektos.

Ed Tuttle is a husband, father, friend, teacher, carpenter, designer, believer, and lover of a good pun. He enjoys plenty of garlic, dark chocolate, spring and fall, coffee/dark beer/red wine with friends, challenging teaching, honest preaching, engaging conversations about God and culture, and great guitar solos. Ed loves sunrise drives, overcast days at the shore, the smell of wood, and his wife's, kids', and grandkids' voices. He has raised 4 strong, gifted, independent daughters, and is still in love with his wise and faithful wife of 39 years. This is his second children's book.





Many thanks to
my brother, Don, for his
countless hours and emails
editing my work, and to my
7-year-old grandson, Dom, for
being the first one to listen while
I read my story aloud, smiling in
all the right places, and
giving it a resounding
“Awesome, Meems!”

Two very special visitors arrive at eight-year-old Sarina's kitchen window. So begins an adventure into the wonders of nature. Sarina watches two cardinals eat their breakfast every morning at her bird feeder, a birthday present from her mother. Many questions pop up, but one in particular puzzles her:



Why does the male feed his mate when she seems perfectly able to feed herself? With the help of her mother, Sarina figures out the splendid answer as a big surprise reveals itself and makes Sarina gleefully exclaim, "Wheet, wheet, and repeat!"