

異語

**THE
WORDS**

**WE
SHARE**

同心

**JACK
WONG**



異語同心

THE WORDS WE SHARE

JACK WONG



安儿!
Angie!





“Package for Mr. Tang?”



"Yep, that's us!"

A lot of the time, when
someone's at the door,
Dad needs my help to
speak to them.



Just like when we go out to eat,
and Dad asks me to choose his meal
from the menu. (Which means I also
get to pick dessert!)





Or when we're at the store, and I have to double-check the labels to make sure he doesn't buy pet shampoo by mistake, like that one time.



安儿, 谢谢你啦。

Thank you, Angie.

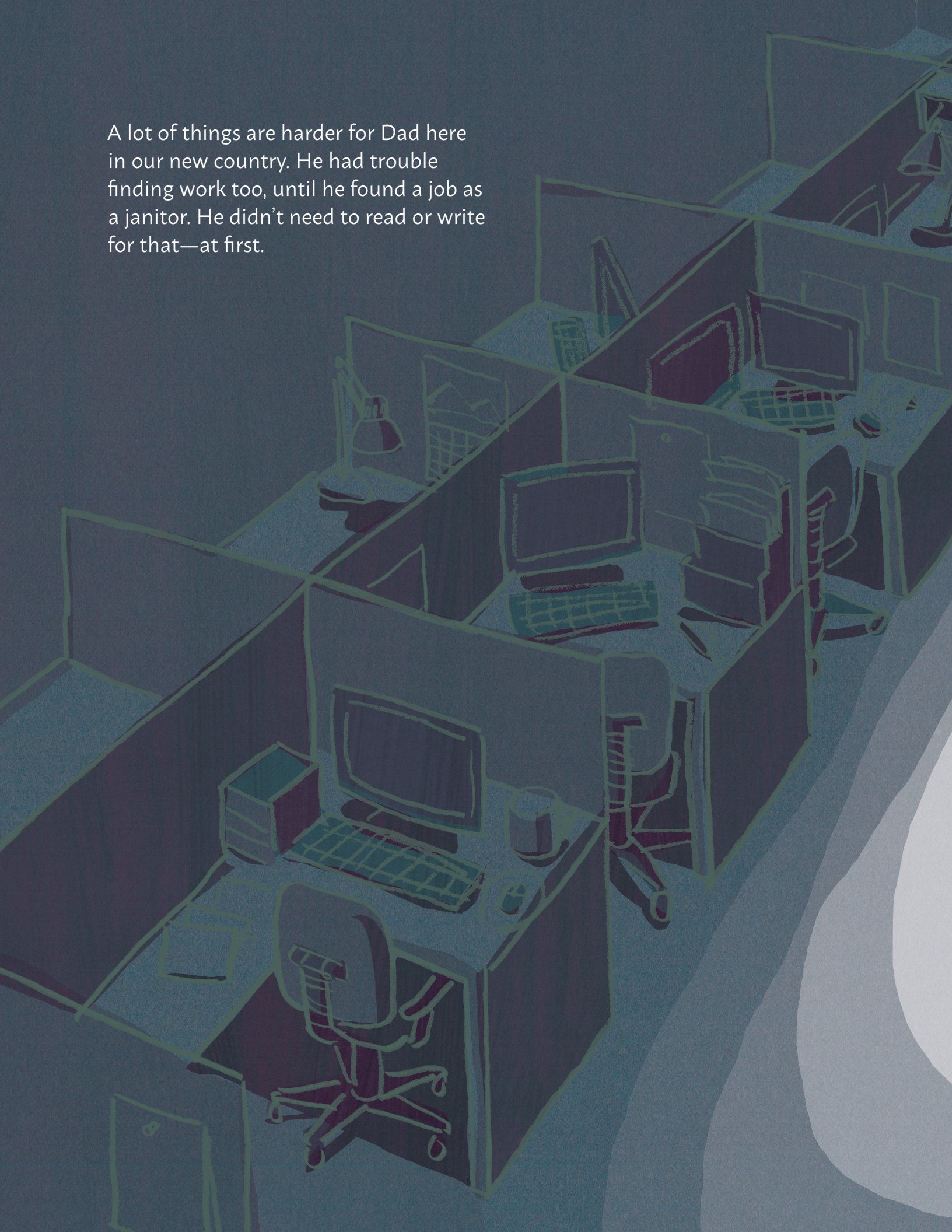
MART-O-RA



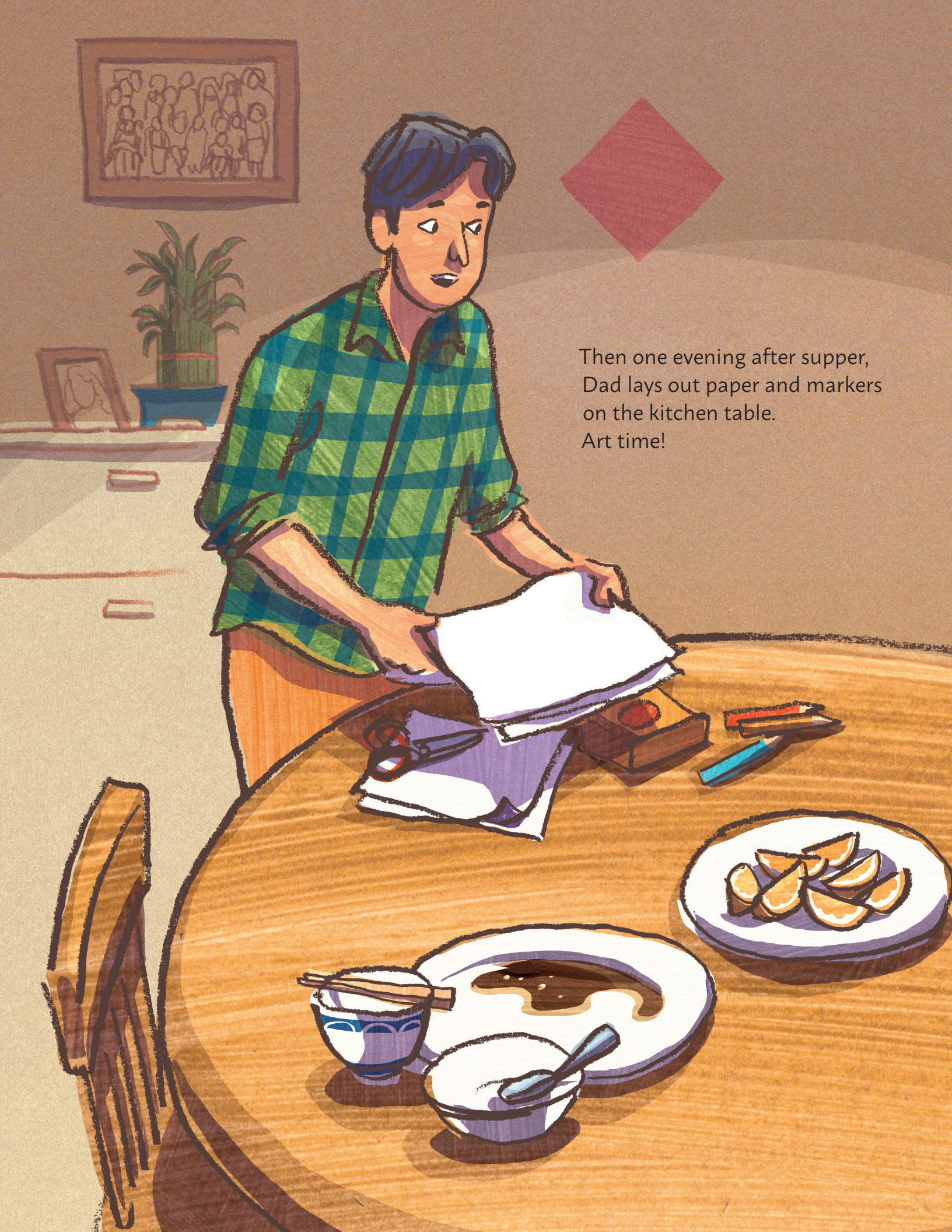


Dad still speaks only in Cantonese.
We both knew just a tiny bit of English
when we first moved to Canada,
but I've learned lots at school since.
That's why I help him out sometimes.

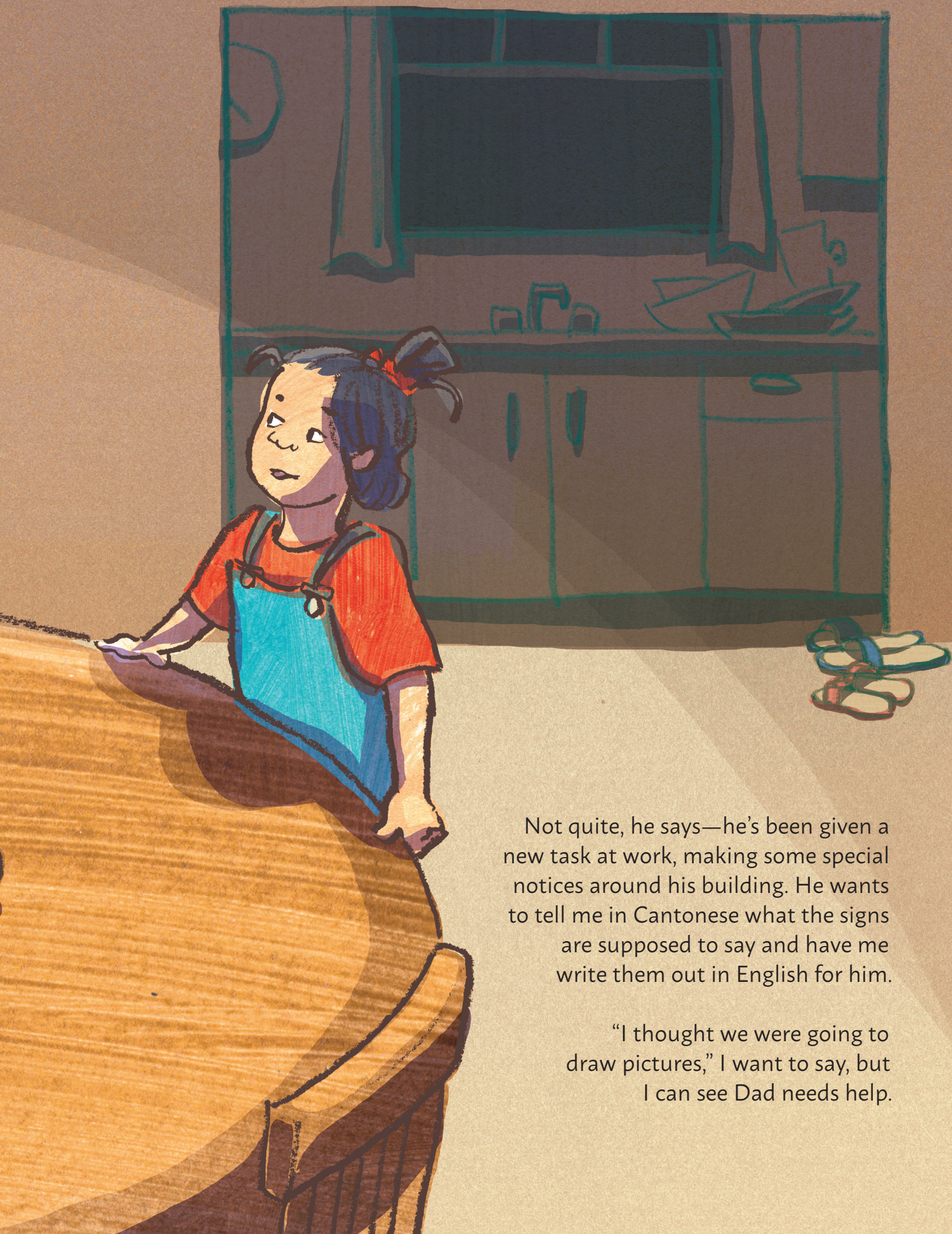
A lot of things are harder for Dad here in our new country. He had trouble finding work too, until he found a job as a janitor. He didn't need to read or write for that—at first.







Then one evening after supper,
Dad lays out paper and markers
on the kitchen table.
Art time!



Not quite, he says—he's been given a new task at work, making some special notices around his building. He wants to tell me in Cantonese what the signs are supposed to say and have me write them out in English for him.

"I thought we were going to draw pictures," I want to say, but I can see Dad needs help.

At least Dad tries to make it fun.



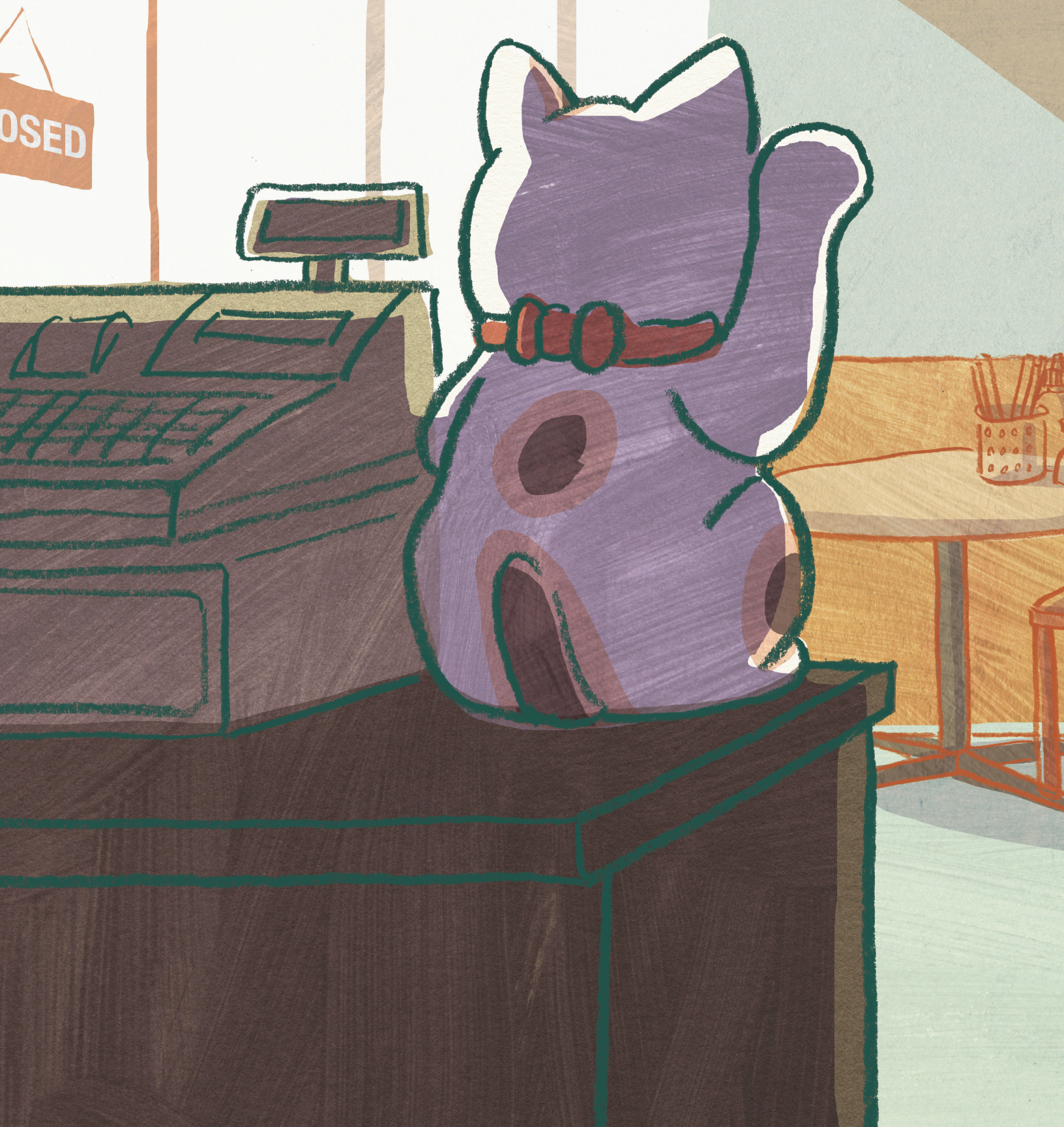


These are brilliant—you're a pro! Dad says, beaming at me.

"Hey, I bet there are plenty of other people who need things written in English for them. Like signs for their store," I tell Dad. "I could start a business!"

If they should be so lucky! he says.

First, I go to Ms. Fong, who owns the canteen in Little Chinatown where we go for lunch sometimes.



太好了！我一直想在外面立个牌子。码头那边很多高级咖啡店都有。

*That would be wonderful!
I've always wanted to put
a sandwich board outside,
like those fancy cafés down
at the waterfront, she says.*



We make a deal that I'll update her sign
with the weekly lunch items.

An illustration of a shoe repair shop. Two women are looking at a warning sign posted on a shelf. The woman on the left has dark hair and is wearing a red shirt and blue overalls. The woman on the right has dark hair and is wearing a yellow shirt. The shelves are filled with various shoes, including brown leather shoes, green sneakers, and purple high-heeled shoes. The background is a dark, textured wall.

Next door at the shoe repair shop, Ms. Lim tells me she needs to do something about all the customers who don't pick up their fixed-up shoes.

WARNING!!
Shoes left for more
than one month after
repair is done will
be given new feet!

I come up with an extra-stern warning sign
for her on the spot!

I try Mr. Chu at the laundromat next.

“Some instructions for my machines would be good!” Mr. Chu agrees. He’s tired of customers always asking him how to use them, with their worn-out buttons and dials.



Mr. Chu doesn't speak Cantonese like Ms. Fong or Ms. Lim, so he has to dictate the steps to me in his English, which is quick and jumpy. I try to write everything down as fast as I can.



For dad, mom, and big sis



A Note from the Author

In this story, Angie discovers that her dad speaks another “language.” Although the Hakka that Angie hears her dad using with Mr. Chu would sound quite different from the Cantonese that she and her dad speak at home, Hakka and Cantonese are similar in other ways; for this reason they are sometimes called different varieties or dialects of a family of languages called Chinese. One of the similarities between Cantonese and Hakka is their shared roots: both are commonly found in Southern China and Southeast Asia, including in Hong Kong (where I was born and learned Cantonese as my mother tongue). Another similarity is that both Cantonese and Hakka speakers (as well as speakers of other Chinese varieties you may have heard of, like Mandarin) read and write using the same Chinese characters, which is the writing you see on some of the pages of this book.

The Chinese title that you see on the cover is pronounced “Yee Yu Tong Sum” in Cantonese. In a reversal of Angie’s story, it was me asking my mom for help to come up with this translation! Because ideas don’t always translate directly from one language to another, she chose a title that means something like “The Same Heart in Different Languages.” And how fitting! Even though the title isn’t exactly the same as the one in English, she certainly captures the heart of the story with it.

My sincere thanks to Nina Wong (mom) and Li-Cheng Gu for their work on the title, and to my dear friend Jenny Yujia Shi for providing translations for the interior.

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