

Papa has never missed my birthday.
"What if he forgot about me?" I ask Baku.
"Papa wouldn't forget," Baku says.



A poignant story about the impacts of family separation and the power of imagination, set during Japanese incarceration in World War II.

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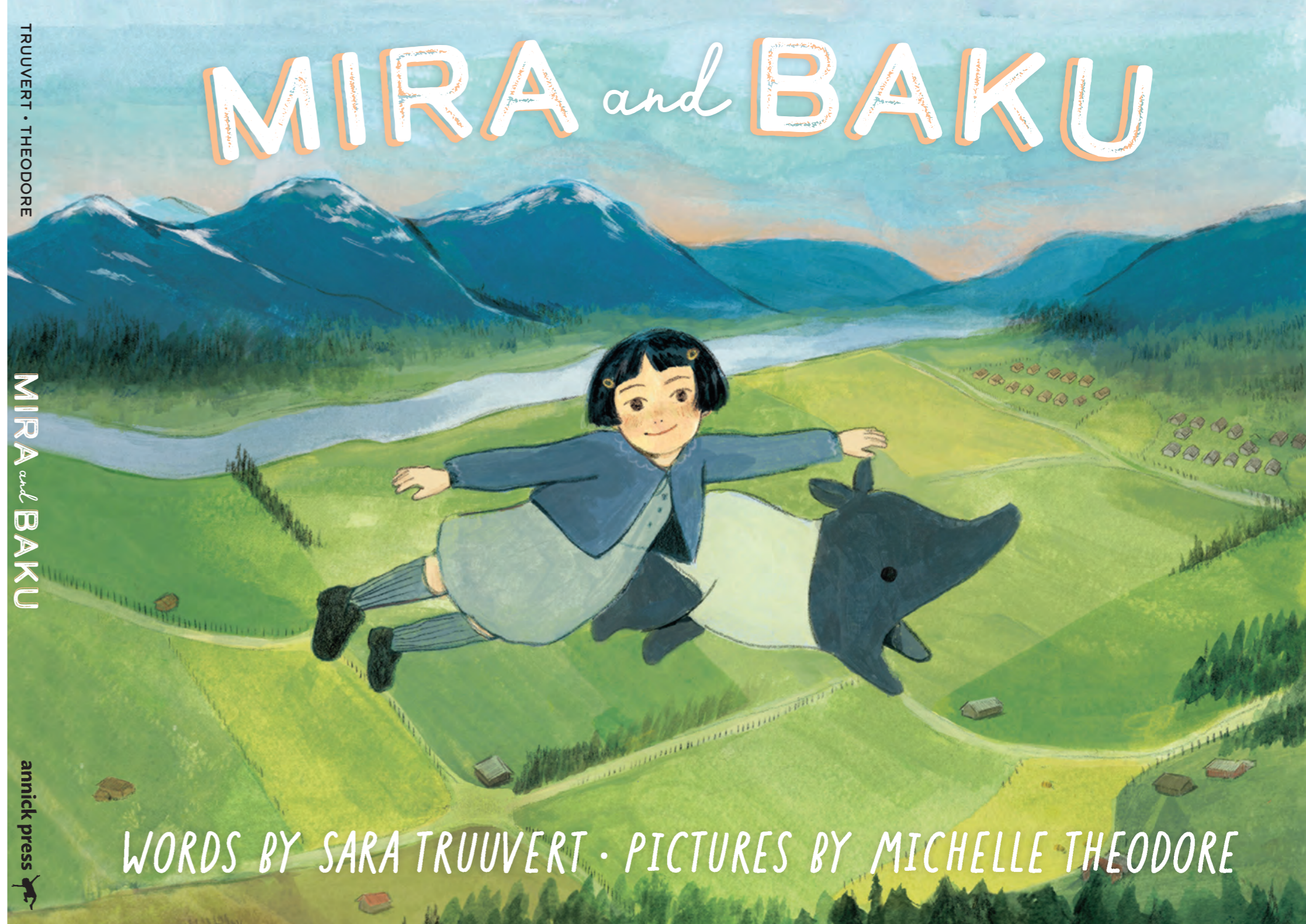
TRUUVERT • THEODORE

MIRA and BAKU

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WORDS BY SARA TRUUVERT • PICTURES BY MICHELLE THEODORE



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To my family.

—S.T.

To the many families whose
resilience now dwells within me.

Mizuguchi, Kishi, Uyeyama,
Sakamoto, Kuramoto, Morimoto,
Kawasaki, and Tanami.

—M.T.

When Ma tells me that Papa won't be here for my birthday, I am angry.

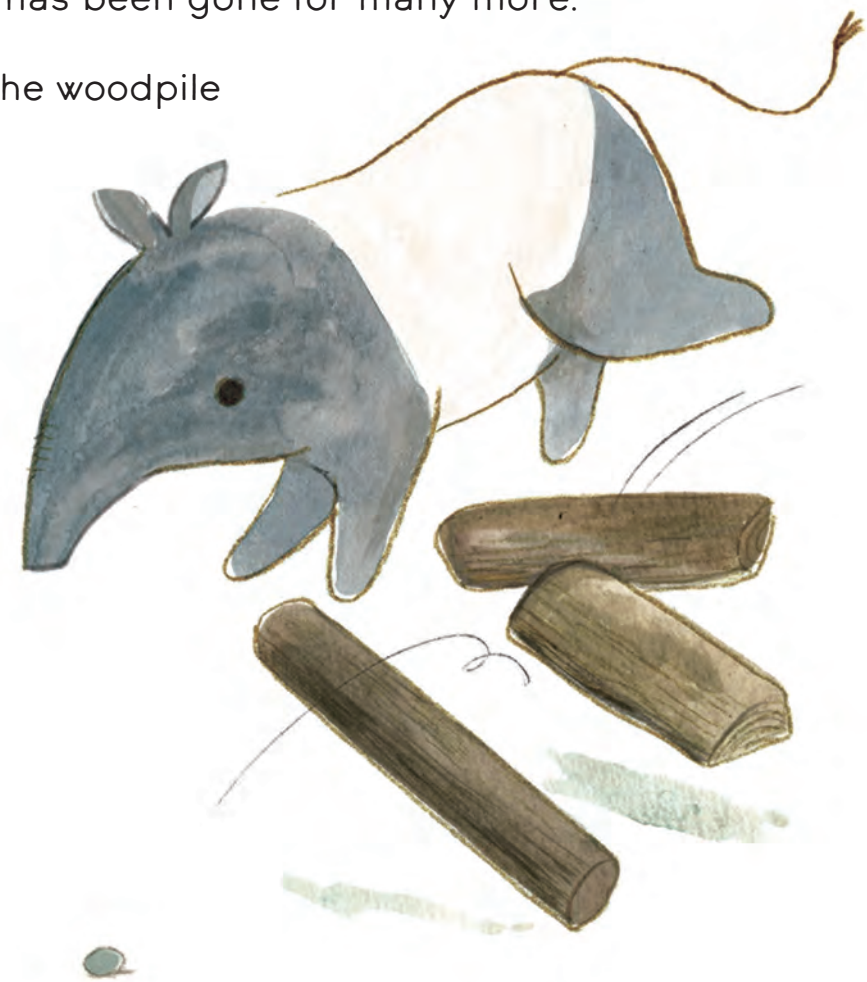
"Why?" I ask.

But Ma bends lower to pull the weeds.



My birthday is in five days. Papa has been gone for many more.

I go behind our house and kick the woodpile until it isn't a pile anymore.



Baku finds me. "Hey," he says, as a log rolls by. "That's a good one."

He points to a stone, small and smooth. It is a good one. I stop and pick it up.



Papa has never missed my birthday. Not even the year I turned five and a storm stole the fishing boats out of the harbor. He ran home at bedtime to give me a hug that left a puddle on the floor.



If he wanted to be here, he'd be here. "What if he forgot about me?" I ask Baku. "Papa wouldn't forget," Baku says. "Something must be wrong."

I want to kick the logs again, but instead I hold the stone tight, tight, tight in my hand. I say, "Baku, we need to find Papa. We need to bring him here for my birthday."



Baku agrees. So off we go.

We fly over fields and houses that lean and creak.
But Papa is nowhere in our little town.



That night, I add the new stone to our collection, which I keep in an old sock.
There are gray ones and black ones and white ones and one that
turns green when it's wet.



Papa found that one. He found it in the spring in a stream,
and he bent on one knee to give it to Ma.
She laughed, pretending to faint.



Papa found a lot of our stones.

I make them into a spiral.
I make them into a star.



It's four days until my birthday. Baku and I fly over mountains and cedar trees that bob and bow. We look through the branches for Papa, but we don't see him.





We fly to our store, where Ma and Papa sold fish. They let me keep the clamshells, cold and secretive. Everyone loved our store.



It's where we found our round white stone. It fell out of a box of fresh salmon Papa was unpacking.

"That's a good one," Papa said.
"Look, Mira! It glitters in the sun."