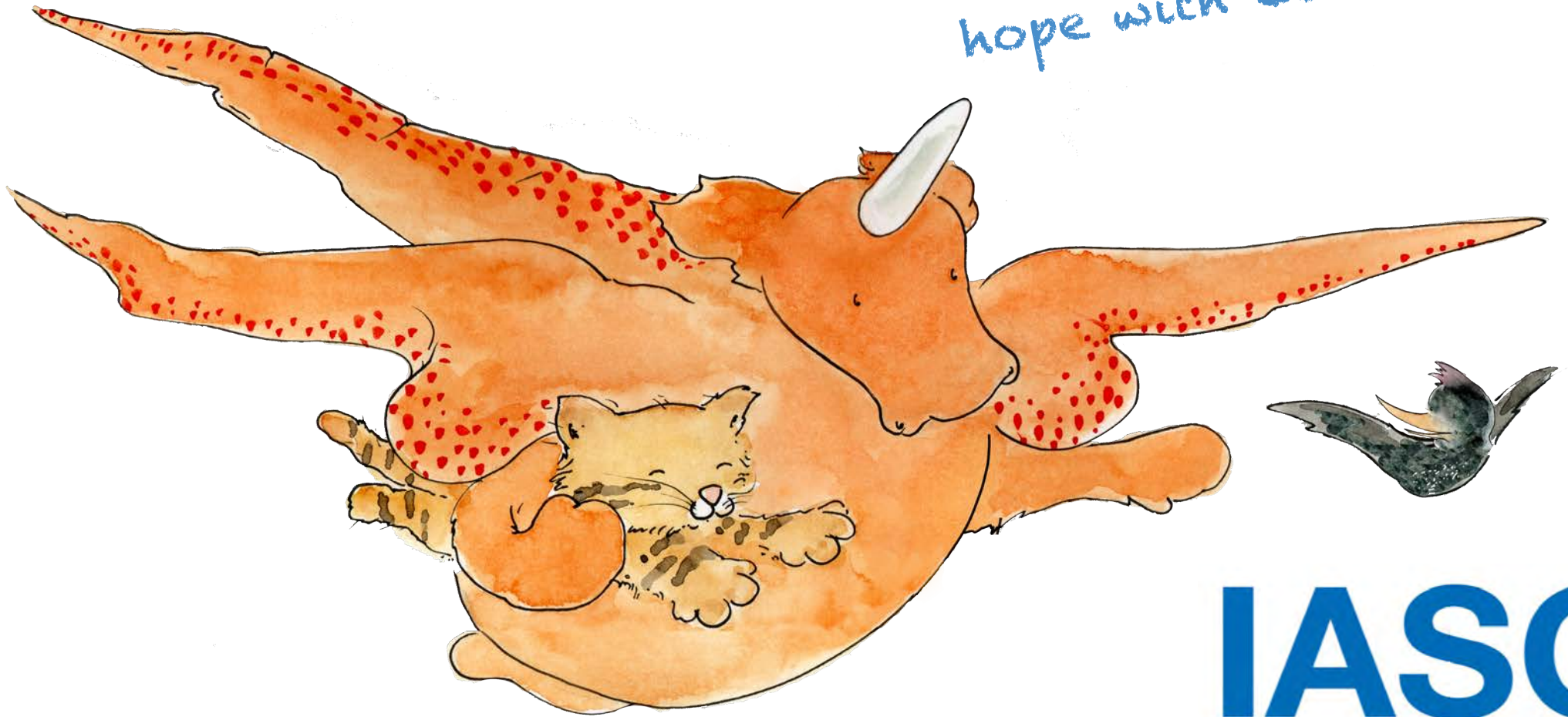


My Hero is You 2021

How kids can
hope with COVID-19!



IASC
Inter-Agency Standing Committee

The making of “My Hero is You 2021: How kids can hope with COVID-19!”

This book is the second edition in the My Hero is You series, developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (IASC MHPSS RG). The project was supported by global, regional and country-based experts from Member Agencies of the IASC MHPSS RG, in addition to parents, caregivers, teachers and children from all over the world.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 1700 children from 104 countries helped to create a children’s storybook on COVID-19 that reached hundreds of thousands of children worldwide. It became a global story of successful reach to children, with more than 140 translations and an extensive list of multimedia adaptations. Today, many children are still living with changes to their daily routines due to the pandemic and are coping with issues that affect their mental wellbeing. Many of the problems of concern are not the same as they were at the start of the pandemic.

For this reason the IASC MHPSS RG, co-chaired by the World Health Organization and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, has created “My Hero is You 2021: How kids can hope with COVID-19!”.

To ensure that this book addresses the hopes and concerns of children during the current phase of the pandemic, we asked children and their parents, caregivers and teachers to share their thoughts, fears and experiences of how their lives have changed. Surveys were distributed in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Hindi, Italian, Russian, Portuguese and Spanish in order to assess children’s mental health and psychosocial needs during the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic. A framework of topics to be addressed through the story was developed using the survey results. Children worldwide read and corrected multiple versions of the story, and their feedback was then used to update the version of the book you currently have.

Around 5000 children, parents, caregivers and teachers from around the world took the time to share with us how they were coping with the ongoing pandemic. Our warmest thanks to these children and their parents, caregivers and teachers for being part of this story. Ario and our global team are grateful.

The My Hero is You series is developed for and by children around the world.

This IASC MHPSS RG acknowledges Helen Patuck for writing the story script and illustrating this book. ©IASC, 2021.

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Introduction

“My Hero is You 2021: How kids can hope with COVID-19!” is a book written for all children in the world affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; it follows the storybook “My Hero is You: How kids can fight COVID-19!”, which was released in 2020. Both books can be read as stand-alone stories. “My Hero is You 2021: How kids can hope with COVID-19!” should be read by a parent, caregiver or teacher with a child or a small group of children. It is not recommended that children read this book independently without the support of a parent, caregiver or teacher.

The supplementary guide “Actions for Heroes” offers support for addressing topics related to COVID-19, helping children to manage feelings and emotions, as well as supplementary activities for children to do based on the books.

Find the supplementary guide here: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/actions-for-heroes>

To read the first book in the My Hero is You series, please visit:

<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/my-hero-is-you>



Translations

The IASC Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (IASC MHPSS RG) itself will coordinate translations into Arabic, Bangla, Chinese, French, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Swahili. Please contact the Reference Group (mhpss.refgroup@gmail.com) for coordination of translations in other languages and formats. All completed translations will be posted on the IASC MHPSS RG website.

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For an overview of all completed translations and formats of “My Hero is You: How kids can hope with COVID-19!”, please visit: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/my-hero-is-you-2021>

Because Ario was a magical creature, who came from children's hearts, he always heard children when they were dreaming, when they were playing, and even when they thought no one else was listening.

One year had passed since Ario and his friends had travelled around the world, telling children how to protect themselves against COVID-19.

They had learned a lot and found new ways to play and keep in touch with friends and family. But some of their worries were louder, and some of their fears were stronger. The virus they had all been afraid of was changing all of the time.

As he flew over the top of the world, Ario heard the satellites also capturing the worries, anger and sadness of children everywhere.

Children had forgotten that Ario was in their hearts, so Ario stayed in their skies, waiting for someone to call him to earth.



Ario missed his friends Sara, Sasha, Salem, Leila and Kim very much. He especially missed Sara, who would always be his hero.

But when the call came this time, it was from a very furry little friend called Tiger.

Ario landed with a flutter of his wings, and appeared outside Tiger's window one evening.

"You called?" said Ario, sitting down on his enormous bottom.

"Meeeow!" screeched Tiger, his hair jumping up like a thousand waving hands. Then he carefully crept close to Ario and sniffed him.

"Is it really you?" he asked, looking up at a child's drawing on the wall of a short, orange Ario with a lovely round belly.



"Were you expecting someone else?" smiled Ario.

"I don't know... I don't really meet new people anymore. I feel shy," said Tiger.

"Well, let's become new friends then," said Ario. "I will ask you what I ask all of my friends when they feel shy or sad. What do you need, right now?"

"Oh no," said Tiger, curling into a ball. "I need something big..."

"Bigger than friendship?" asked Ario.

Tiger smiled for a moment, but then he hid behind his tail again.

"Something even bigger," he said in a small voice.

"I am big!" laughed Ario. "Do you need something bigger than me?"



"I need hope," said Tiger from behind his tail. "After COVID-19, and all these long, lonely days, I need hope for the future."

"Well that's not big," said Ario. "Hope can start very small. But if you hold onto it, it can grow and grow and grow. Hope is all around us. You just need to find a little piece to get started."

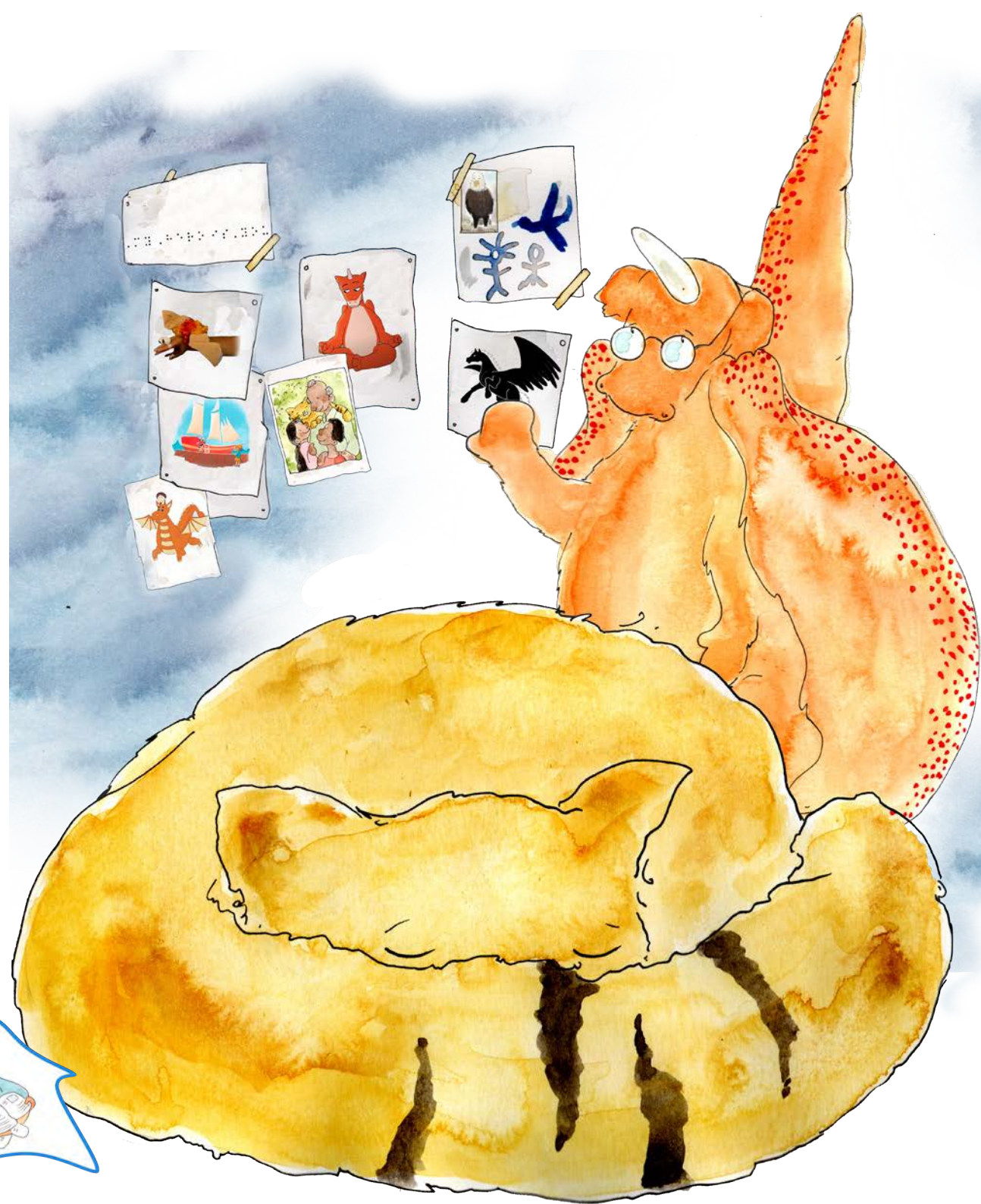
Ario put on his glasses and looked closely at the pictures on the walls, full of family and life, and then at the little boy sleeping in his bed.

"Who drew these?" asked Ario.

"Dad does drawings with my boy," said Tiger. "They cook a lot together, and read stories at night, much more than before. Dad even teaches him at home when he cannot go to school."

"Does that give you hope?" Ario asked Tiger.

"Well, sometimes yes, because it's nice when they are all close together," said Tiger. "But COVID-19 is here, all the time. No one knows when it is going to go away..."





"Excuse me," came a soft voice from outside the window. Ario and Tiger jumped in surprise then turned to the window, where a blossoming tree was waving her branches at them.

"I heard you talking and I wanted to tell you what gives me hope," she said.

Ario scooped Tiger up onto his back and they climbed down carefully onto one of the tree's branches to sit beneath her. The tree was so happy, her blossoms were flying into the air.

"Every year I blossom once, and share my flowers with this street," she said. "For so long, no one noticed me, but these past years, people came to look at me. They smelled my flowers and fed my birds! I feel seen, and loved."

"You are loved," said Ario. "When everything is changing, you stay the same. Thank you for that."

"My leaves change every year," said the tree.
"The seasons change, the sky changes, and I grow bigger. Change can be scary sometimes, but it can also bring fruits and flowers."

A loud snort came from above and they looked up to see a shiny black bird yawning in the tree.

"My friend Zoozie visits me every year," said the tree. "She is a starling, and she has flown here from far away."

Zoozie was a grumpy starling, who was trying to get some sleep. She ruffled her feathers as the tree shook her gently.

"It's much quieter because children don't go to school as much," said Zoozie, yawning. "But I do miss their laughter in the playground. Every time I fly from the south to the north, I see people doing things differently. Some people wear masks, some people don't. Some children go to school, some children don't - like here."

"Children going to school!" cried Tiger. "That would give me and my boy hope for the future. My boy misses school so much!"



"Shall we go and find hope for the future?" Ario asked them. "We could fly!"

"Well, I'm awake now," said the starling, spreading her wings. "Let's go!"

Ario scooped up Tiger with Zoozie beside them, and together they soared into the sky. The tree waved her branches to wish them well on their adventure.



"Tiger is an unusual name for something so small," said Zoozie as they flew higher and higher above the earth.

"Dad called me that last year," said Tiger. "It's because I give my boy warm cuddles and remind him to be brave, like a Tiger. But I don't feel very brave. We have been in our home for a long time."

"It takes a lot of courage to stay in the same place, Tiger," said Ario. "Especially when it keeps others safe."

Tiger felt happier when he heard that, and snuggled into Ario's warm fur.



However, when they reached the clouds it became dark and misty, and Tiger started to feel very afraid. He felt himself starting to shake.

"What's wrong, Tiger?" Ario asked him.

"The darkness makes me feel sad," said Tiger. "It was like this when grandfather got sick, and then we lost him. It was like the lights went out and we thought they would never come on again."

"What makes you feel better when you feel like this?" Ario asked.

"A big hug, from my boy," said Tiger.

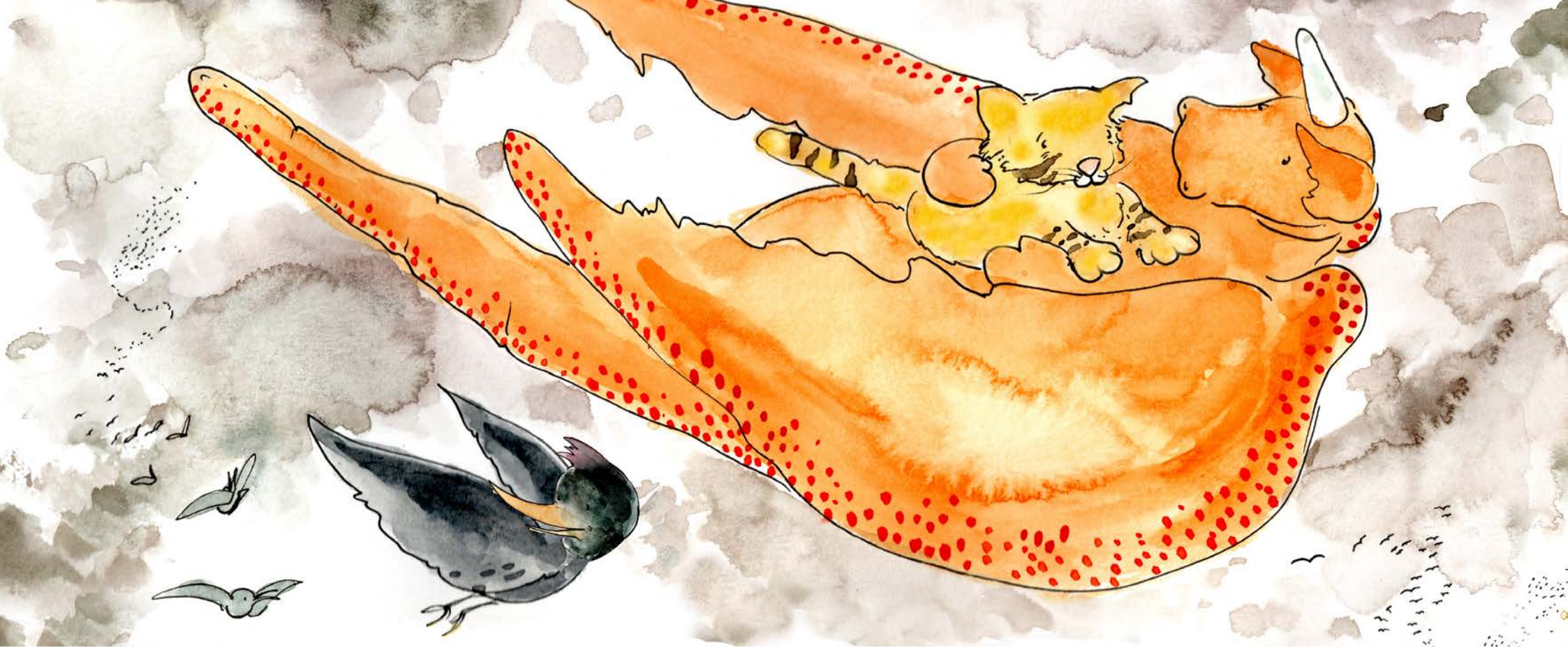
"I just need to sleep," said Zoozie. "I get so tired when I'm sad."

"Sleep is really important ... it's hard to feel hopeful without sleep."

"Yes, we are all so different," said Ario. "When I can't have hugs, and I can't sleep, I breathe in deeply. Then sometimes I breathe out fire!"

Ario blew a small burst of light into the darkness, warming them all up for a moment.





"I also think of all my starling friends," said Zoozie. "Look! There they are!"

Suddenly, in the clouds, a flock of starlings appeared, all flying together and dancing in the wind.

"And look! They are staying at least one metre apart!" said Ario. "See?"

Ario swept beneath them, spinning Tiger around in his arms.

"Tiger, when I'm stretching my wings and dancing with my friends I feel much better," said Zoozie.

They flew on in silence, because sometimes words are not as good as just being together. Zoozie and Ario cared about Tiger, and he knew that.

They flew for what felt like days until they met a friendly mountain top, chilling in the fluffiest white clouds.

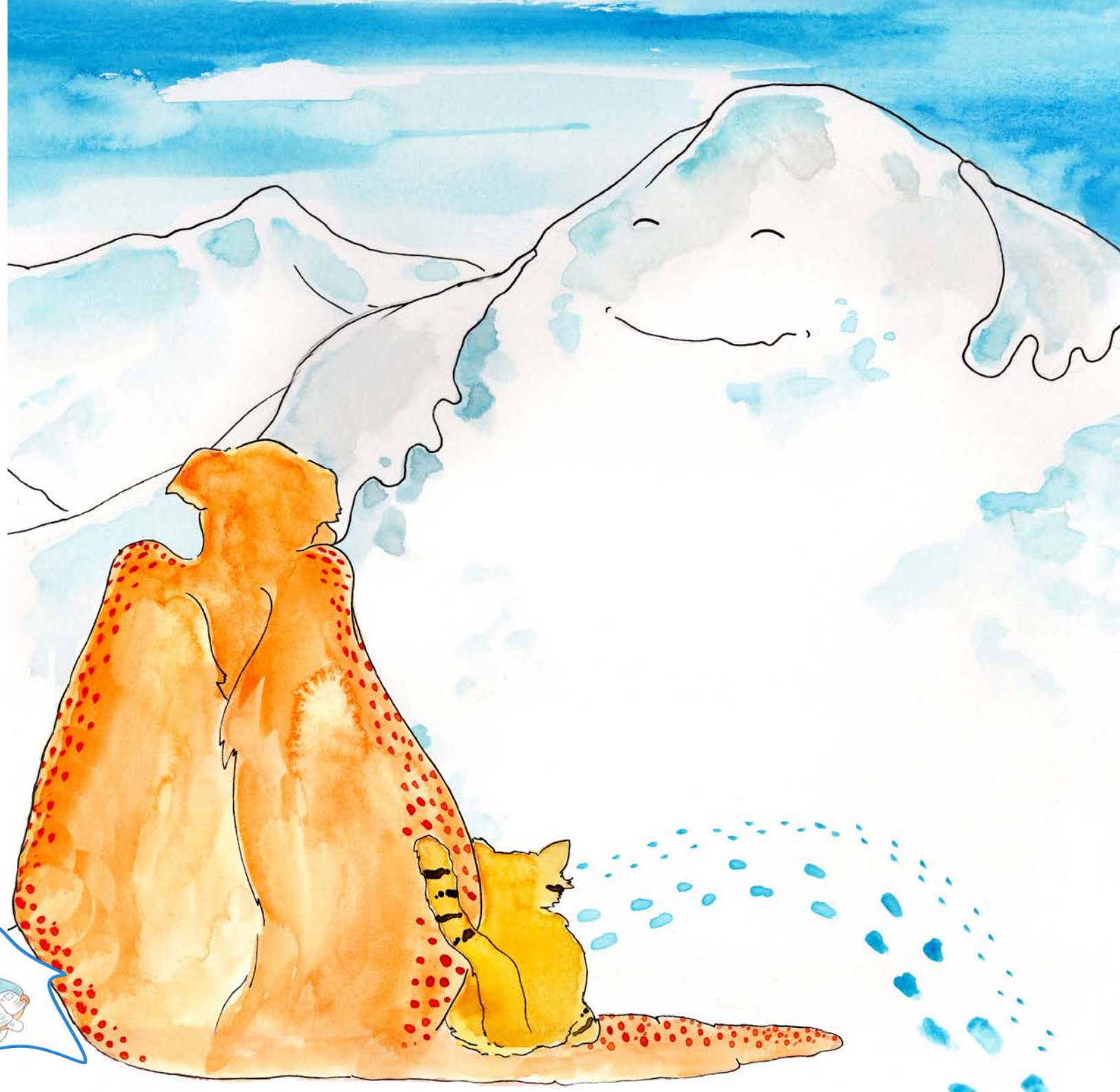
Ario, Tiger and Zoozie landed in his soft snow for some fresh icicles and listened to what the mountain top had been hearing.

"Well, up here, I hear mostly silence," she said. "But when it is very windy, I also hear children keeping in touch with their friends and families. I hear their worries too. Since COVID-19 came, their worries are very loud. I just try to listen, because sometimes when people let their worries out they start to feel better."

"Is there something you are worried about?" asked Ario.

"I am worried that my snow is melting too fast," said the mountain, watching her slopes with sad eyes.

"How do you stay hopeful for the future, up here all on your own?" asked Tiger.



"I try not to worry about the future," said the mountain. "I am grateful for every bird, snowflake and friend who comes each day, and when they are not here, I draw them in the snow, like snow memories."

"That's what my boy does!" laughed Tiger, playing in the snow, drawing a small snow Ario.

"Wait... who is this?" asked Ario, looking at the snow pictures. A small drawing showed a girl with beautiful braids of black hair. "Is that...?"

"Sara?" said the mountain.

"But how did she get here?" asked Ario. He was amazed, and suddenly missed his friend deeply.

"She and her friend Sasha came on a llama, up the slope, carrying face masks – from over there," said the mountain, pointing with her snow to a steep slope nearby.



"I know exactly where we can find hope for the future," said Ario, jumping to his feet so quickly that the mountain shook beneath them!

"Goodbye, dear mountain!" he called as he scooped Tiger up into one arm, and Zoozie into the other. He slipped onto his belly and they sped down the mountain. Snow sprayed everywhere until it disappeared and he soared into warmer air.

Ario knew exactly where he was flying, and as soon as he saw the house, he landed with a big flump, placing Zoozie and Tiger gently down onto the ground.

Sara stepped out of her front door with a smile as wide as the oceans that Ario and his friends had flown across.

She asked if she could hug Ario, a question answered by Ario's wide-open arms.

Ario laughed with happiness.

Because it was the first time in so long, the two friends hugged for a long time. It had been so long since they had seen each other.

"I have missed giving you a hug so much," whispered Sara.



Sara's mum came outside, pushing Sasha in her wheelchair.

"Mum!" cried Sara. "Look who has come back!"

"You must be Ario," said Sara's mum, smiling.

"And you must be the best scientist in the world," said Ario. Sara's mum laughed.

"Sometimes," she said.

"But I also have more time to spend with my little hero now."

"Like my boy's dad!" said Tiger. "He has more time at home now. But sometimes he gets angry or seems sad..."

"It happens to me too," said Sara's mum. "Especially when I have so much to do. We are all going through a very challenging time. We need to take care of ourselves and tell each other we care – and that we love each other."

"These are my friends, Tiger and Zoozie," said Ario, before he spread his wings to give Sasha a huge hug.



"We are trying to find hope for the future," Tiger told them all.

"Hope is important," said Sara. "Ario and my friends gave me hope on our adventures last year! We told everyone that we all need to stay safe by washing hands, staying at least one metre apart, and wearing masks. And my mum has been helping to create the vaccine!"

"Sara is doing important work too," said her mum, giving her daughter a kiss. "It is important to develop the vaccine, and it is also important to make sure that no one feels alone."

"Are you really the best scientist in the world?" Tiger asked her.

"There is no one best scientist," smiled Sara's mum. "We work together, and that's what makes people feel better again. The person who wraps the vaccine in a package, or drives it to a hospital, or gives it to someone is just as important. We are all like the little rocks that make up the strongest mountains."

"It's just..." said Tiger, suddenly feeling shy. "How do you have hope for the future, as the best scientist in the world?"

"That's easy," said Sara's mum, smiling: "I just look at Sara."



Sara was looking at Ario.

"You told me that you came from my heart, Ario," said Sara. "And when you left, something else came from my heart. When I started telling people about our journey last year, everyone wanted to talk to me about it, in so many different languages, and in so many different ways."

"What do you mean?" asked Ario.
"Let me show you!" said Sara.

Taking Ario's hand, she led him into her house, where there was a small computer making sounds. On the screen there were lots of children's faces, some of whom Ario knew.

"We are part of the Ario Team," said Sara proudly. "Our friends are in our hearts, online, or even write letters! We talk to people all over the world about how to stay safe and connected too. Some people think that not everyone gets COVID-19. But everyone can get it, can't they, Ario?"

"They can," said Ario, sadly. "It doesn't matter what the colour of your skin is, or where you live."





"Or if you can walk or roll," said Sasha, wheeling into the room, with Tiger curled up in her lap, purring loudly.

"When I feel lonely I like to talk to my friends online," she said. "We talk about the things that make us laugh and the games we love playing!"

"I love creating new songs and playing them for my friends!" cried Juan, a new computer friend.

"Some people still can't do things outside of their home, because it's not safe yet," said Kim, from the computer.

"They are being responsible and protecting themselves and others," said Leila, from the computer. "We try to talk to them about what helps us, all of us, in our own ways."

"Living with COVID-19 is different for everyone," said Salem. "I worry about Leila sometimes, because she lives in a camp."

"Sometimes it is so hard," said Leila. "But it helps to sing and learn new things and play with my friends."

"It is different here," said Kim. "My mother still has to go sell fruit in the market and I worry she will get sick."

"It doesn't matter where you live, or how you live, little heroes," said Ario. "Everyone gets scared sometimes."



"Even tigers?" asked Tiger.

"Even tigers!" said Sasha, stroking Tiger's fur. "When I lose hope, I find it again in my safe place."

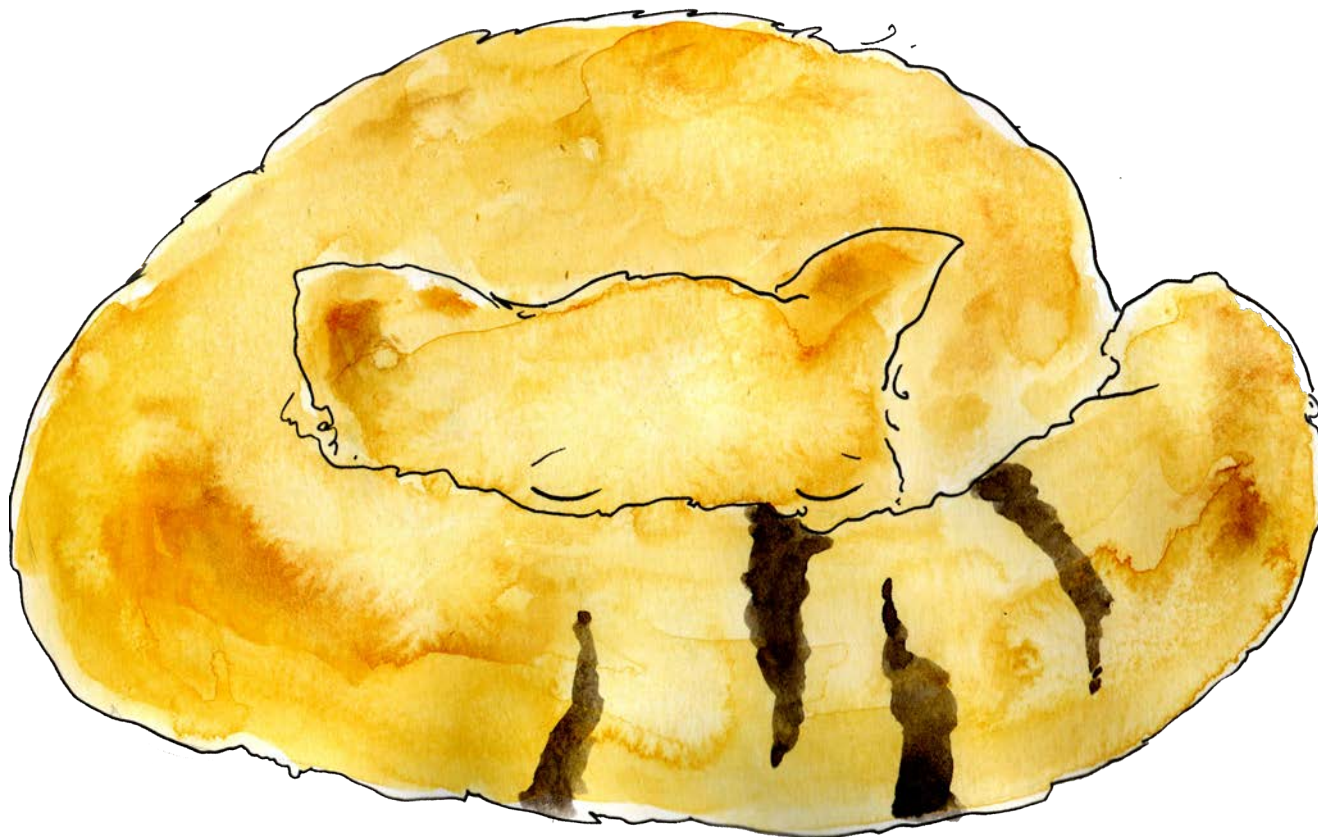
"When I go to my safe place, it is you who is always there with me," Sara told Ario, leaning against his wing.

"What is a safe place?" asked Tiger.

"It's a place you can go to in your mind, where only you can go, and you can invite whoever you want to go there with you," said Sasha.

"Can I go there when I don't feel hope for the future?" Tiger asked, curling his tail around his head.

"You can go there whenever you need to," said Ario. "Would you like to try?"



And so Ario led them to their safe places, by asking them to make themselves comfortable, to close their eyes and to breathe deeply. The other children on their screens could join them too.

"Focus on a memory or a time when you felt safe," said Ario.

He then asked them what they could see, what they could feel, and what they could smell in their safe places. He asked if there was anyone special they would like to invite into their safe places and what they might talk about together.

"You can go to your safe place whenever you feel sad or afraid," said Ario. "This is your super power, and you can share it with your friends and family. And remember that I care about you, and many people do. That will help too."



When they opened their eyes, Tiger realized that his safe place was at home with his boy.

He climbed into Ario's lap and asked if they could go home.

"But have we found hope for the future?" Ario asked him.

"A little bit, I think," said Tiger in a small voice.

"Remember what I told you back at home," said Ario. "Hope is all around us. You just need to hold onto a little piece of it and it will grow."

Slowly, with loving care, Ario placed his hands on his heart and took a long, deep breath.

With a whooshing sound, everything changed!



Every friend in their story was transported to a satellite soaring through the sky – with the stars and moon smiling down on them!

“My friends!” Sara cried, hugging Leila, Kim and Salem.

“Hold tight, little heroes!” called Ario. “I want each of you to write down what gives you hope, and share it with the world. Take a piece of paper, and write what is in your heart.”



So the children started to write and draw what gave them hope as the earth turned beneath them.

"My mum making the vaccine," said Sara.

"Our school opening!" cried Juan.

"Flowers growing on my friend the tree," said Zoozie.

"Realising I am brave," said Tiger.

"Singing songs," said Sasha.

"My grandfather telling me a story," said Salem.

"All our new friends!" cried Kim.

"That's right," laughed Ario. "Now, fold your paper into an airplane, or a bird, or a star – whatever you like! And send it from our satellite. We will ask the sun, the stars and the moon to help us – look, they are watching!"



And so the children sent their messages, and as they fell from the sky towards their homes, those messages turned into rain drops, and snowflakes, and flower blossoms, and falling coconuts and rainbows stretching over beaches.

Ario took them to see as children returned to schools below in different countries across the world, and Tiger watched in wonder.

“Do you see, Tiger?” said Ario. “Sometimes we just need to ask our friends to help us find hope – they are always here, as am I.”

Ario turned to his old friends.

“It’s time to say goodbye, but I will be listening to you all,” said Ario.

“You are so important to me,” said Sara.

“And you are all important to me too,” said Ario. “We should tell each other that all the time.”

Scooping Tiger and Zoozie up into his arms, Ario took off into the sky.

“Can we go home to my boy now?” asked Tiger.

“Now that sounds like an adventure,” smiled Ario, and they set off together, filled with friendship – and hope.



