



WAITING

BY NADINE ANNE HURA

Bella started the timer on her tablet the day they moved in. It was winter, and the house was freezing. The carpet was mint green and had stains. Her mum took the biggest room, and Dylan got the second-biggest room, and Taylor came next ... so of course Bella ended up with the smallest one at the end of the hall. It was more of a wardrobe than a bedroom. The bed touched the walls at both ends, and when the door swung open, it banged into the bedside table.

"We're lucky to have a house at all," Mum said, seeing the expression on Bella's face. "Let alone a room each."

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A few weeks after moving in, Bella was lying on her bed, reading, when she heard Pīata barking. Pīata was still a puppy and curious about everything, but on this day, it sounded like she was far away. *Too far away*. Bella sat up and looked out the window just in time to see a flash of light brown disappear under the neighbour's fence.

"Mum!" Bella shouted, throwing aside her book. "Pīata's escaped!"

She ran to the end of their long driveway. The gate to the neighbour's was unlatched, so Bella pushed it open and tentatively followed the cobbled path.

"Pīata!" she called. "Haramai e Pii!"

"Who's that?" a voice said.

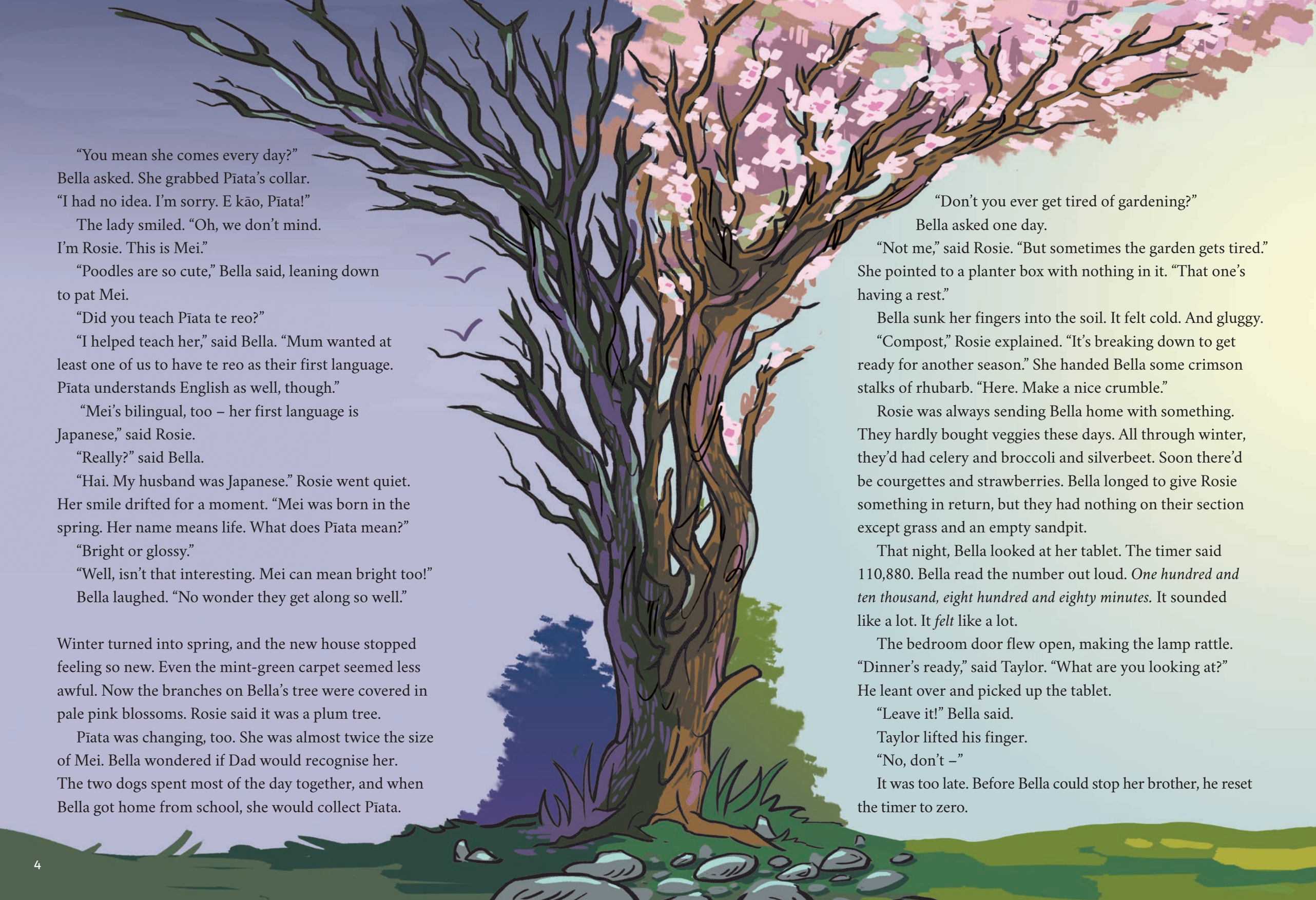
Bella froze. She could see a straw hat moving behind a lavender bush. "I'm really sorry," she said. "My dog snuck into your garden."

A woman with a basket appeared on the path. Pīata was frantically sniffing and panting around her ankles. "So you're her owner?"

"You *know* Pīata?" Bella said.

"Yes, but I didn't know her name until now," the lady said. She scratched Pīata behind the ears. "She usually comes in the mornings. I think she enjoys the company." The lady turned to a black dog that was lying on the grass. A poodle. "What do you think, Mei? Does Pīata get lonely?"





“You mean she comes every day?”
Bella asked. She grabbed Piata’s collar.
“I had no idea. I’m sorry. E kōo, Piata!”

The lady smiled. “Oh, we don’t mind.
I’m Rosie. This is Mei.”

“Poodles are so cute,” Bella said, leaning down
to pat Mei.

“Did you teach Piata te reo?”

“I helped teach her,” said Bella. “Mum wanted at
least one of us to have te reo as their first language.
Piata understands English as well, though.”

“Mei’s bilingual, too – her first language is
Japanese,” said Rosie.

“Really?” said Bella.

“Hai. My husband was Japanese.” Rosie went quiet.
Her smile drifted for a moment. “Mei was born in the
spring. Her name means life. What does Piata mean?”

“Bright or glossy.”

“Well, isn’t that interesting. Mei can mean bright too!”

Bella laughed. “No wonder they get along so well.”

Winter turned into spring, and the new house stopped
feeling so new. Even the mint-green carpet seemed less
awful. Now the branches on Bella’s tree were covered in
pale pink blossoms. Rosie said it was a plum tree.

Piata was changing, too. She was almost twice the size
of Mei. Bella wondered if Dad would recognise her.
The two dogs spent most of the day together, and when
Bella got home from school, she would collect Piata.

“Don’t you ever get tired of gardening?”

Bella asked one day.

“Not me,” said Rosie. “But sometimes the garden gets tired.”
She pointed to a planter box with nothing in it. “That one’s
having a rest.”

Bella sunk her fingers into the soil. It felt cold. And gluggy.

“Compost,” Rosie explained. “It’s breaking down to get
ready for another season.” She handed Bella some crimson
stalks of rhubarb. “Here. Make a nice crumble.”

Rosie was always sending Bella home with something.
They hardly bought veggies these days. All through winter,
they’d had celery and broccoli and silverbeet. Soon there’d
be courgettes and strawberries. Bella longed to give Rosie
something in return, but they had nothing on their section
except grass and an empty sandpit.

That night, Bella looked at her tablet. The timer said
110,880. Bella read the number out loud. *One hundred and
ten thousand, eight hundred and eighty minutes.* It sounded
like a lot. It *felt* like a lot.

The bedroom door flew open, making the lamp rattle.
“Dinner’s ready,” said Taylor. “What are you looking at?”
He leant over and picked up the tablet.

“Leave it!” Bella said.

Taylor lifted his finger.

“No, don’t –”

It was too late. Before Bella could stop her brother, he reset
the timer to zero.

“I was so mad,” Bella told Rosie the next day. “I set that timer going the day we moved in.”

“That’s a shame,” said Rosie. “What were you counting?”

“The minutes,” Bella said quietly.

“Are you waiting for anything in particular?”

Bella shrugged. It was complicated. She didn’t want to talk about Mum and Dad and their problems.

“You don’t need a clock,” said Rosie. “There are other ways to measure time.”

“What do you mean?”

“The seasons, of course,” Rosie said. “You probably think time moves slowly, but if you watch the garden, you’ll see things change every day.” She pointed to a row of green, feathery tops. “These carrots weren’t much bigger than my thumb last week – now look at them! Sometimes I think time passes too quickly!” She pulled out a few carrots and passed them to Bella. “For your lunchbox.”

Bella kept an eye on the plum tree all summer. And just as Rosie had said, the changes happened quickly. The spindly branches produced leaves, followed by tiny green fruit. Bella pulled one from the tree; it was hard and bitter. Pīata sneezed and ran away after trying it.

The plums ripened to a dusky red and became sweet. Every day, Bella collected the fallen fruit and took some next door to Rosie. “Make a nice crumble,” she said with a smile.

One day, on her way back from Rosie’s, Pīata shot ahead, barking with excitement. Bella saw a car in the drive. A familiar figure stood by it.

“Dad!” she shouted, running towards him.

“Hey, Bub.” He held his arms wide, then wrapped them around her.

Bella stood with her eyes closed. She didn’t want to let go. “You’re back!” she sniffed.

“I’m back,” Dad said. “It’s been too long, eh, Bub.” He paused. “I’m really sorry.”

“It’s OK,” Bella said. “I got good at waiting.”



ILLUSTRATIONS
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by Nadine Anne Hura

The Ministry of Education and Lift ducation would like to thank Caroline Campbell, Donald Preston, and the fourth-year students of Massey University College of Creative Arts Master of Design course for their work on the illustrations for “Waiting”.

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Published 2020 by the Ministry of Education,
PO Box 1666, Wellington 6140, New Zealand.
www.education.govt.nz

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Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

ISBN 978 1 77663 615 0 (online)
ISSN 2624 3636 (online)

Publishing Services: Lift ducation E Tū
Editor: Susan Paris
Designer: Simon Waterfield
Literacy Consultant: Melanie Winthrop
Consulting Editors: Hōne Apanui and Emeli Sione



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SCHOOL JOURNAL LEVEL 3 AUGUST 2020

Curriculum learning areas	English Social Sciences
Reading year level	Year 5
Keywords	absent parents, change, divorce, family, friendship, gardening, neighbours, patience, pets, relationships, resilience, seasons, separation, time, waiting