

ISA IN CYBERSPACE

A Shooting Star

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Isa Moves to Pittsburgh

Mr. Isa Mac, who was 9 years old, grew up in New York City with his mother and his father and his big brother. Their apartment was so tiny that they all slept in one room, their sleeping room, and did everything else in the other room, which was their living room. The living room was where they ate and played and dressed and put on their shoes and took off their shoes and made pillows of their jackets and sat on them when visitors used up all the chairs. It was where Mrs. Mac unpacked groceries and cooked and talked on her iPhone. It was where Isa and his brother, Hiro, did their homework.

When Isa's father had to work, he shut himself into the closet. When his mother had to

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think, she shut herself into the closet, but she said it didn't work. If she wanted to sew, she couldn't.

Sometimes his mother would shake her head and press her hands over her ears and look out the window at all the fire engines and police cars and trucks whizzing by on the street far below. His mother said it was noisy all day long and all night long, too. That's why their sleeping room was important. It was quieter back there.

But there was no elevator and they lived on the fifth floor.

When his mother went shopping, she would always be very tired in the evening because she had to carry the groceries up and up the stairs that zigzagged all the way from the street until they stopped at the top where Isa lived. Because shopping was so hard, she only went sometimes. And because she only went sometimes, she had to buy lots and ended up with many, many bags to carry.

When they got home, Mrs. Mac left the

heaviest bags in the hall just inside the door by the street. Isa's father carried those up when he got home. When Isa was very little, his mother could not leave him in the hall, so she carried him up first because he was the most important. When Isa grew up, he got his own backpack to carry the milk and rice. Once he got a big package of soap to carry. It was very awkward, but Isa didn't mind because it smelled nice and he was helping out lots.

As Isa grew bigger, he helped more and more. But that didn't help much, because the apartment got smaller and smaller, and he got sad, because his mother was sad. She said she needed to breathe. He was so sad. His mother couldn't breathe.

In the summer, his mother got very quiet for a long time. She didn't put her hands over her ears, and she didn't shake her head. She just thought and thought. After summer was over and Isa went back to school, she got very, very busy. Then early one morning right after Christmas, he woke up and there was his Uncle

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John standing in their sleeping room. Uncle John was tall and smart and quick and kind and strong. He had his own moving company and drove a truck and carried great big things and could pack anything very fast.

Uncle John shook Isa very gently off his mattress, folded up the mattress, and carried it away. He came back and took Isa's bedspread, put everything in the room except Isa in the middle of it, pulled the corners together, and tied them into a big knot. Breathing deeply and grunting like a big animal, Uncle John lifted the bundle onto his back and hobbled out of the sleeping room and through the living room right out into the hallway by the stairs that zigzagged all the way down into darkness to the street.

Isa stared with wide eyes. There lay Isa's mattress right by the stairs. Uncle John heaved the bundle onto Isa's mattress, sat himself down behind it, turned to wave to Isa, and shoved off. The mattress began bumping down the steps slowly at first, then faster and faster, with Uncle

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John riding it, hugging the bundle. At the first corner there was a giant lurch and loud grunt from Uncle John, but in the next instant the mighty transport – mattress, bundle, and Uncle John – whipped around the corner and out of sight.

Isa went back to his sleeping room and stared around him in amazement. The room was empty. His uncle had put everything in that bundle and lugged it away. Where would he sleep now? Isa wondered.

Isa wanted to ride down the stairs, too, but all the mattresses were gone. Instead, his mother made him wash and dress. He had to eat a rice cake with sliced banana and peanut butter and drink some cocoa and put on his coat and go to the bathroom one more time before he could go downstairs. And still he couldn't ride. He had to walk.

On the street was a big truck, and in the truck were all the mattresses and clothes and toys and pans and computers and his father wearing his big traveling hat. Hiro was packed

in between computers and his mother's sewing boxes and plastic pillows full of fabric, because his mother was a seamstress and could sew all kinds of things.

"Where's Uncle John?" Isa wanted to know.

"He's gone," his father said without taking off his hat. "He had another moving job."

Isa's mother packed Isa into the truck beside Hiro, who was sleepy and grumpy and hit him on the head with a mouse pad as soon as their mother shut the truck door.

"Ow!" Isa said.

Hiro squished the mouse pad onto Isa's nose and wiggled it there.

"Stop it!" Isa cried, pushing the mouse pad away.

Hiro punched Isa right on the number of Isa's basketball shirt. That was that.

Isa punched Hiro as hard as he could in the gut. Hiro screeched, which was fake, Isa knew, because Isa couldn't punch that hard.

But no one paid any attention to them. His mother and father were too busy packing all

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sorts of things into the truck all around them. Hiro and Isa forgot their fight when Hiro asked:

“Is this our new home?”

Isa wondered about that. That would be bad because it didn't have a bathroom. Or maybe it did way in the back.

A terrible noise startled Isa. It was the truck. His father was in the driver's seat with his hat on. He had done something to the truck to make it growl. Then the truck rumbled. Then it jumped forward. Then it stopped. Then it jumped forward again. Then it began to roll.

Very carefully, Mr. Mac turned the very big wheel at his chest. The truck with everyone and everything in it bumped up onto the sidewalk where a lot of people were walking. The people all turned around in surprise and looked at the truck on the sidewalk.

Then Isa understood. His father was going to drive the truck into the building and up all those stairs, and his mother would never have to be tired again. They could park the truck in the living room. That would give his mother lots

more space, because the truck was bigger than their living room and had lots of places to snuggle and think. Then Isa began to wonder how the truck would fit in their living room if it was bigger.

But Mr. Mac very carefully bumped the truck down off the sidewalk, and they began to move away from their building very slowly. With another big bump, Mr. Mac very slowly jerked the truck onto the road. Then the truck stopped and Mr. Mac wiped his face with a towel. He stopped wiping his face because he saw Mrs. Mac was looking at him.

“I’ve done this before,” Mr. Mac told her.
“I’ve done this. I can drive a truck.”

“It’s a pretty big truck,” Mrs. Mac said.

“I can drive a truck,” Mr. Mac said. “It doesn’t matter how big it is.”

“Maybe if you took the hat off,” she said.

“I need it to keep the sun out of my eyes,” Mr. Mac said.

“There is no sun,” Mrs. Mac said.

“There will be,” Mr. Mac said. “There will

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be.”

A car behind them honked its horn and somebody yelled something.

Mr. Mac waved and smiled quickly, then grasped the big steering wheel. He took a huge breath like a rhinoceros Isa saw on YouTube, and moved a long stick that stuck up between Mr. Mac’s seat and Mrs. Mac’s seat. That made the truck growl and rumble, and it moved some more.

The truck stopped and started a lot because a lot of cars were parked everywhere. The person in the car behind them yelled and honked a lot. And Mr. Mac had to stop and wipe his face on the towel a lot.

Soon, the truck didn’t start and stop anymore. It crawled between all the cars, and Isa could look down on them. The truck turned onto a bigger street and began to hum deeply. The truck came to a ramp that led them up to lots of layers of curly roads. Up and up they crept. They curved around and under and around and under all those roads until,

suddenly, they were racing along. The wind streamed past Isa's face, making him close his eyes. It made his stomach tickle. It was like a hurricane. It was splendid.

The truck's deep, contented humming buzzed right through Isa's legs until he felt he would jiggle right off his buzzer seat. It was neat. Hiro played a game on his iPad. The lumpy seat Isa's mother sat in was so big, Isa couldn't see if Mrs. Mac was there or not. He hoped she was. Isa looked at the hat on his father's head. The strap bobbed under his father's chin when he turned his head, which was a lot. The truck rumbled and rumbled and rumbled and buzzed and buzzed and buzzed. Isa wondered some more if they lived in the truck now. The strap under his father's chin bobbed and bobbed and bobbed . . .

Suddenly everything stopped.

Isa woke up.

The truck was quiet. All was still. And cold. Isa looked out the truck window. All was dark. Tall, shadowy trees swayed high overhead.

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The truck suddenly growled and started to move backwards this time. It rolled down down down. Hiro sat quietly, his eyes wide open. Isa sat quietly, his eyes wide open. Isa wondered if they were going to live in a hole. The truck stopped. All was still again. All was quiet. The truck exhaled and went into a deep sleep. Isa's father stretched his arms very slowly. His mother did not move. Isa hoped she was there. His father creaked opened the door of the truck.

The sound of birds squirted in. There were more birds out there in the shadows than Isa had ever heard in all his life. The air smelled cold and strange, too. But Isa knew what smell it was. It was Isa's first smell of winter.