

L_eo

a
ghost
story

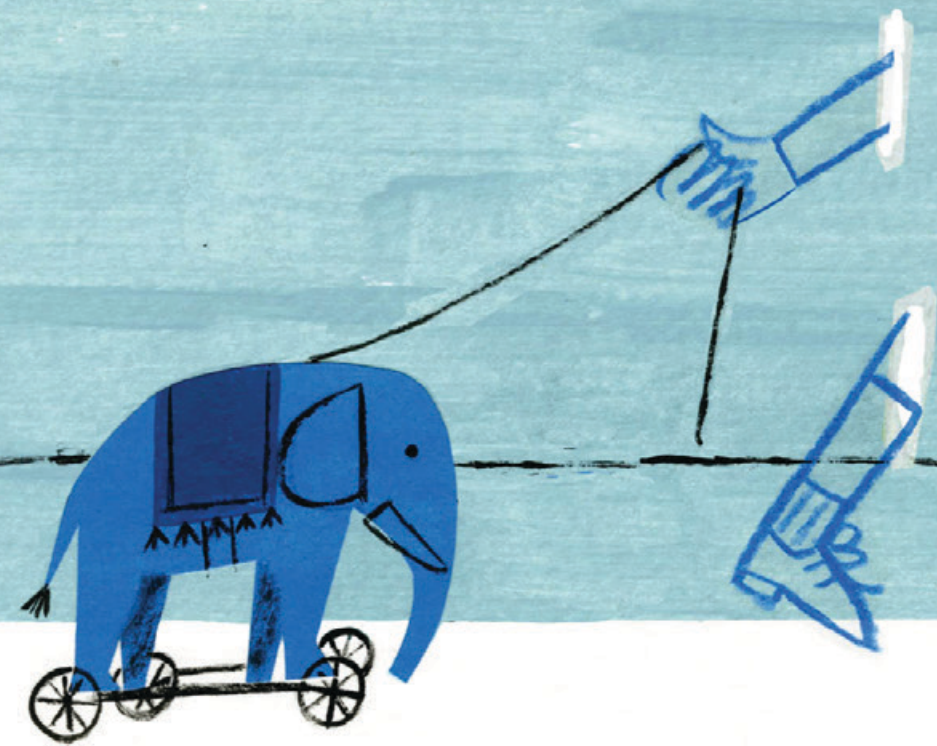
by
Mac
Barnett

pictures
by
Christian
Robinson





ABC



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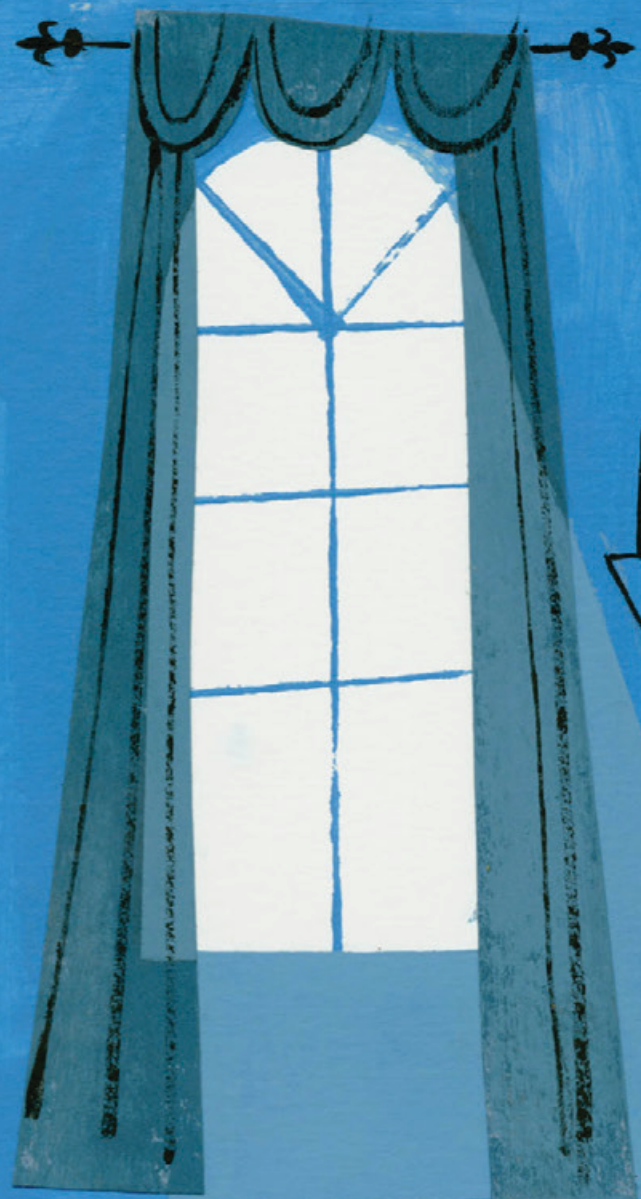
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This is Leo.
Most people cannot see him.



But you can.
Leo is a ghost.



For many years, Leo lived by himself in a house on the edge of the city, reading books and drawing pictures in the dust.



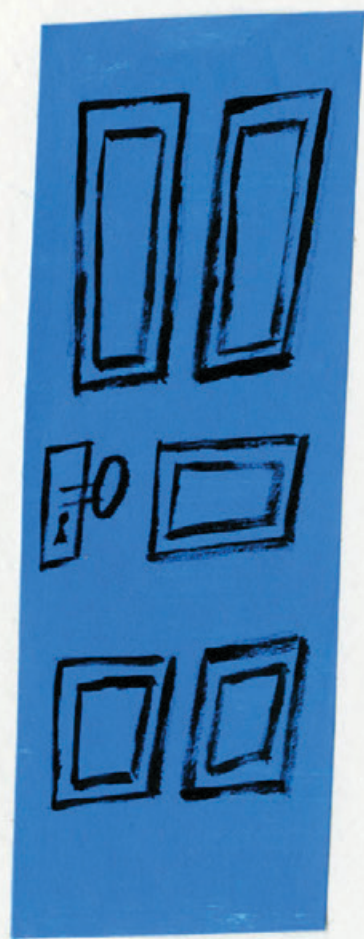
One day in spring, a family moved in.



Leo was glad to have company. On the family's first night, he made them mint tea and honey toast. Leo thought he was being a good host.



But the family saw things differently.



They hid in the bathroom
and locked the door.

"This house is haunted!"
said the man.

"Gary, I'm scared!" said the
woman.

"I hate tea!" said the boy.
"And I hate ghosts!"



They did not know that Leo was floating above
the tub. He heard everything they said.

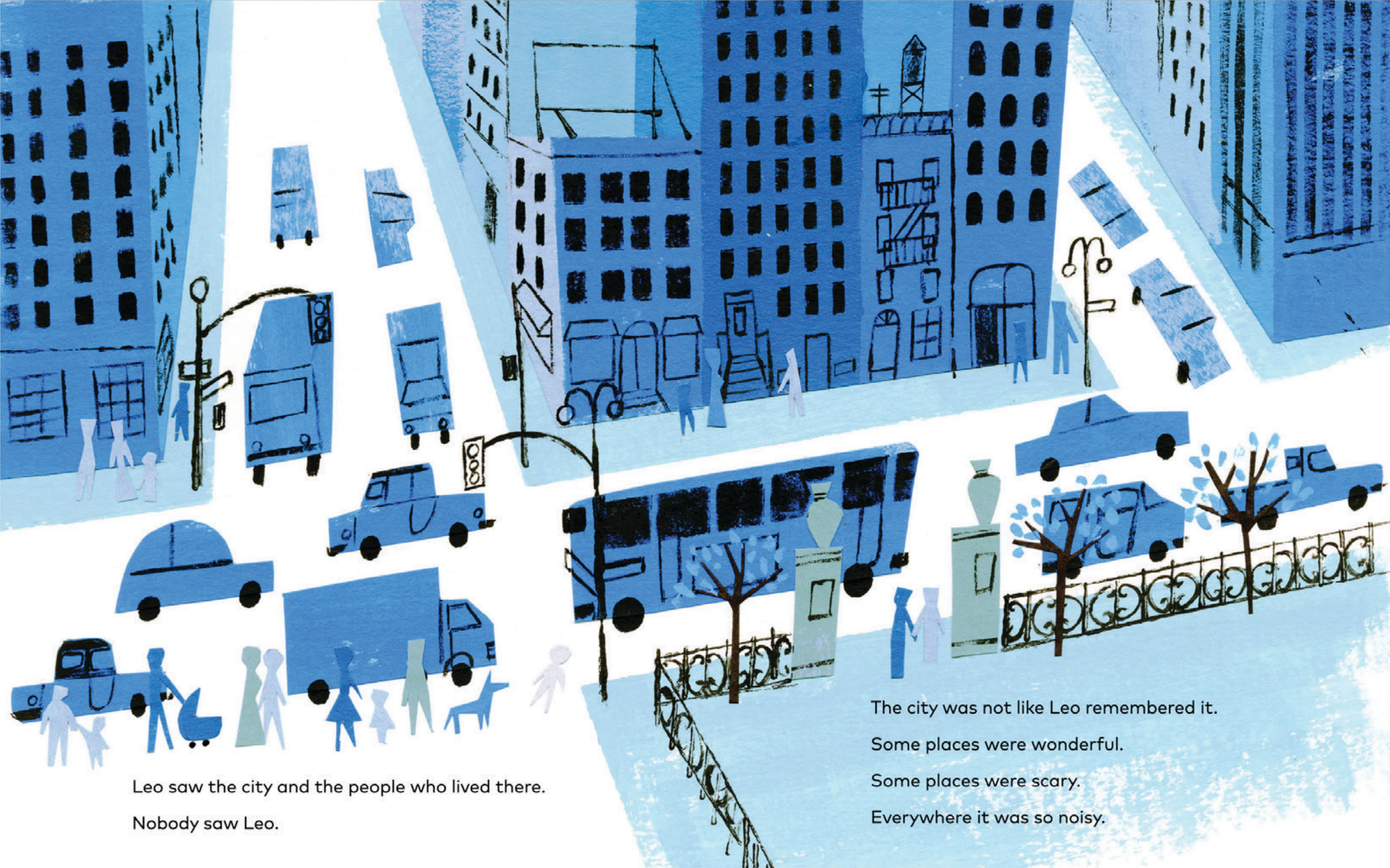


The family called in a scientist, a clergyman, and a psychic to get rid of the ghost.

But they should have saved their money: Leo knew he was unwanted. He said goodbye to his home and left.



"I have been a house ghost all my life," Leo thought.
"Maybe I would like being a roaming ghost for a while."
So Leo roamed.



Leo saw the city and the people who lived there.
Nobody saw Leo.

The city was not like Leo remembered it.
Some places were wonderful.
Some places were scary.
Everywhere it was so noisy.

Leo went to a street corner where his favorite candy store used to be. Now nothing was there.

"Excuse me," he asked a police officer. "Do you know where—"



The officer walked right through him.

There was an afternoon when Leo found himself roaming along a sidewalk covered in drawings.

He came across a girl holding chalk in her hand.

The girl looked up and stared right at Leo. "I'm Jane," she said. "What's your name?"

It was so strange to be looked at that at first Leo said nothing.

Finally he replied, "I'm Leo."

Jane nodded. "Leo, do you want to play Knights of the Round Table?"



"Yes," Leo said, because he did.

"Good," said Jane. "First you have to get knighted by the king."

"Who is the king?" Leo asked.

"I am!" said Jane. "That's why I'm wearing this crown on my head."



Leo looked at her head. He did not see a crown.



Still, he kneeled down and was knighted on the spot.

Leo and Jane sat at a table.

"Sir Leo," said Jane, "meet Sir Ruffs, a loyal dog. Don't you think he looks handsome in his armor?"

"Yes," said Leo. He bowed at an empty chair.



"And Sir Leo," said Jane, "this is Sir Mews, a loyal cat. Don't you find his whiskers wise looking?"

"I do," said Leo, and he bowed again.

"And finally," said Jane, "this is Sir Squawks—"

Leo interrupted: "A loyal bird."

Jane frowned. "No," she said.

"Sir Squawks is a giant hamster."

"Oh," said Leo. "I, well, I'm not wearing my glasses."

Jane squinted at the chair.

"I guess," she said.



"Jane!" A woman's voice came from another room. "Tell your imaginary friends goodbye and come down to dinner."

"Fine!" said Jane. She turned to Leo. "My mom doesn't think imaginary friends are *worthwhile*. But I think you're great."

And with that she stood up and went to the kitchen.



Leo felt awful. "She thinks I am imaginary," he thought. "If I tell her I am a ghost, I will scare her away."

After dinner Jane returned to her room and gave Leo a sword. They snuck into a cave, slew a dragon, and stole all his loot. When Leo closed his eyes, he could almost see the gold coins and green scales.

After a glorious feast, it was time for bed.





Jane gave Leo a pillow and a sheet. "Don't tell Sir Ruffs," she said, "but you are my best imaginary friend."
"Yes," said Leo.

He was so happy he couldn't sleep.





And so Leo was awake when a sneak thief climbed through the window.



Leo went to the living room so he wouldn't wake Jane with his rustling.
All night he lay on the floor designing his coat of arms.



"Halt!" cried Leo.
But the thief passed through him on his way to the silverware.

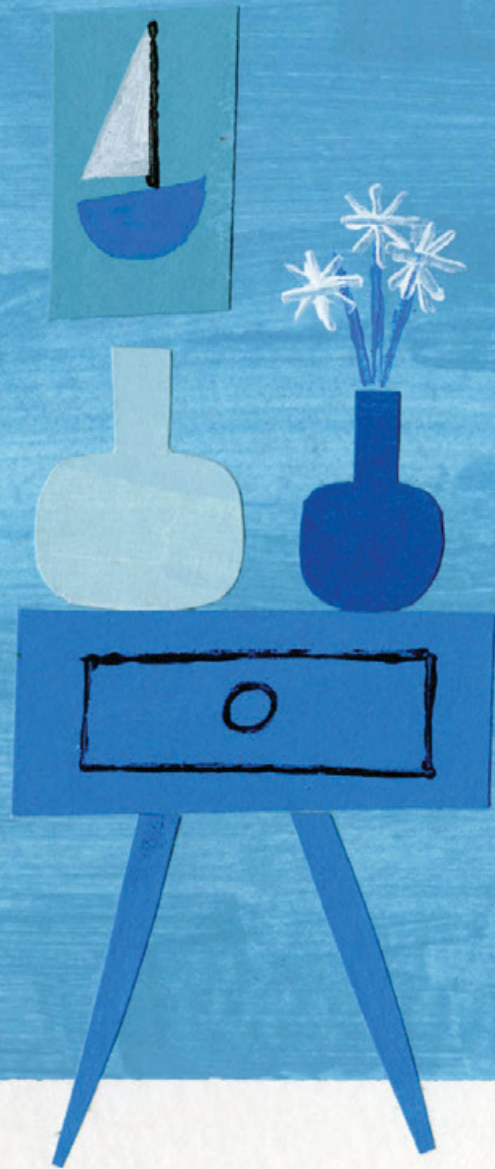
Later Leo would not be able to say where the idea came from.

He threw the bed sheet over himself and flew at the thief, who was so frightened he dropped all the salad forks. Leo chased the man into a closet, then slammed the door shut and locked him inside. It was very well done.





The sound of the door woke Jane, who called the police and roused her mother. A squad car came and hauled the man off to jail. That was that.



"Thanks," said Jane.

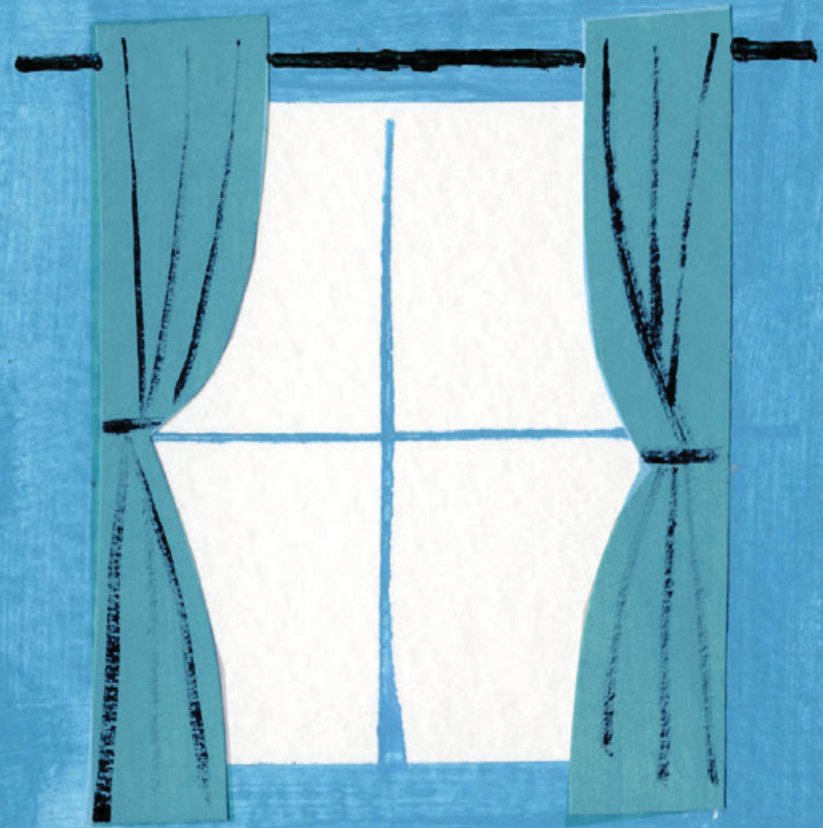
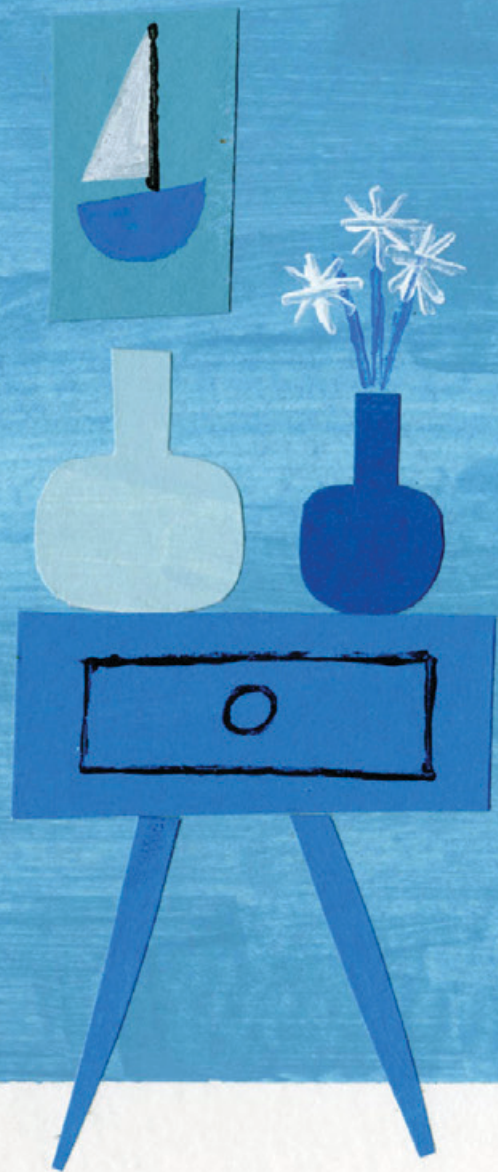
"You're welcome," said Leo. "I'm glad I could help."

"But, Leo," said Jane. "If you're my imaginary friend, how did you scare that robber?"



Leo looked down at the carpet. "Jane, I told you a lie. I am a ghost. I said I was your imaginary friend, but I'm not. I am just your real friend."

"Oh!" said Jane. "Well that's even better."



And they went to the kitchen to have mint tea
and honey toast at midnight.

For Jon Klassen.—*M. B.*

For friends, real and imaginary.—*C. R.*

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