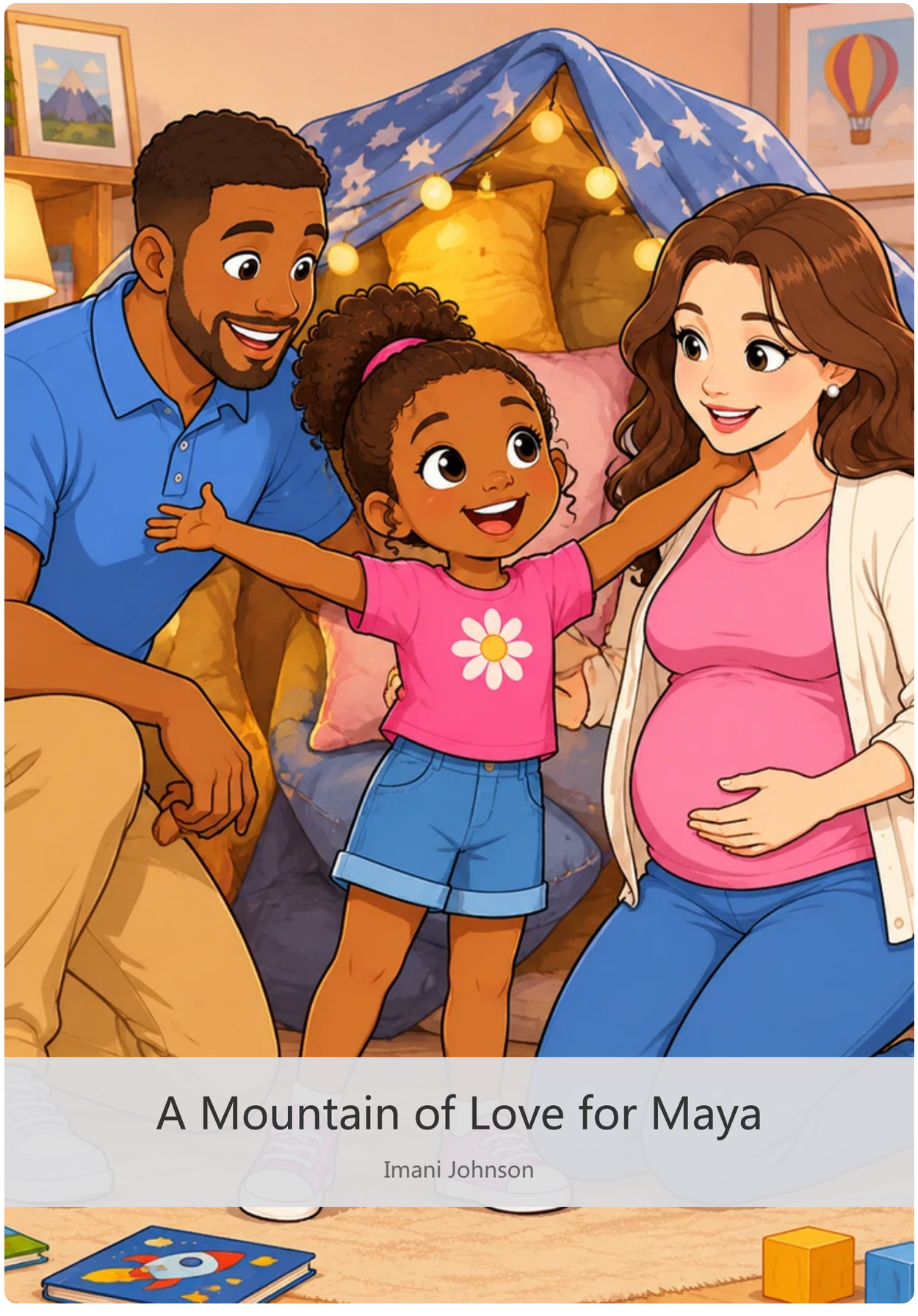

A Mountain of Love for Maya
Imani Johnson



One bright afternoon, Maya sat painting when a warm hand touched her shoulder. Dad, with stepmom Brenda whose belly was growing round, smiled at the colorful swirl on the canvas. "It's a special heart for all of us!" she beamed.



Dad and Brenda spent hours setting up the nursery, painting the walls soft baby blue. Maya tried to help, but her favorite job was arranging the cuddly stuffed animals, making sure each one felt right at home.



Some mornings Brenda just didn't feel well, her face pale. Maya noticed and quietly placed a cool, damp cloth on Brenda's forehead, bringing her a tall glass of fresh orange juice with two tiny straws.



Days stretched into weeks, and Brenda's belly became so big it was a perfect, round pillow. As they cuddled on the soft, velvet sofa reading a funny book, Maya felt a strong thump against her cheek and giggled in surprise.



Marcus surprised Maya, picking her up early from school with a warm, sugary treat in hand. They spent the afternoon at the leafy park, laughing as they built a tall, shaky sandcastle right next to the splashing duck pond.



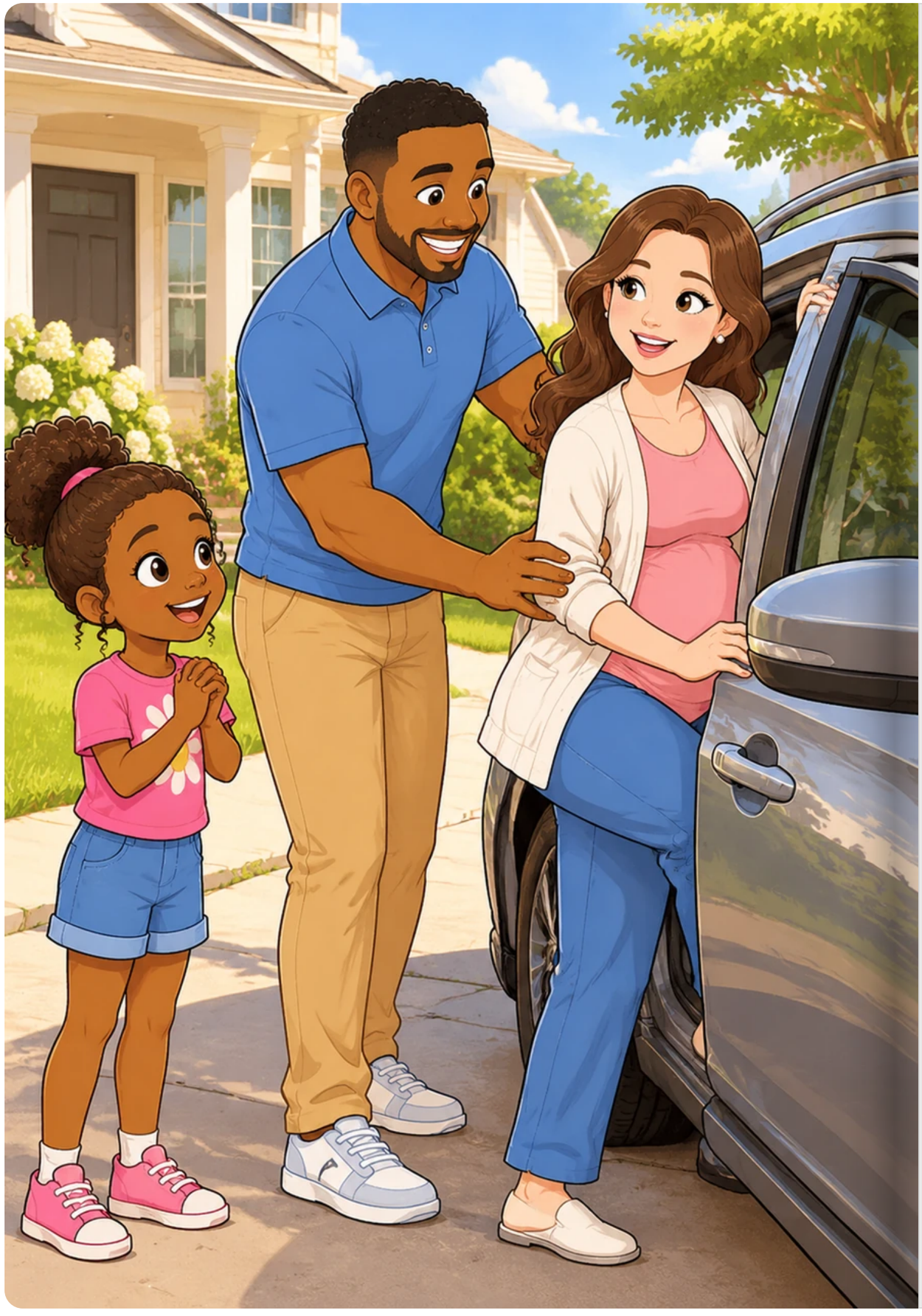
Brenda sat surrounded by crinkly, colorful paper, looking radiant as friends shared funny stories and gave gifts for the new baby. Maya felt so grown up helping carefully unwrap tiny socks and soft, white blankets.



Then, a special delivery arrived – Grandparents David and Sheila! Their bags were bulging not only with their own things, but also with wonderful surprise presents just for Maya and the new baby.



Grandpa David was a champion cuddler and Grandma Sheila told the most amazing animated stories. Maya loved showing them her drawings and building blocks, getting endless hugs, whispers of love, and sneaky treats.



One morning, things felt busy and important in the house, but different. "The baby is coming!" Dad cheered, carefully helping Brenda into the car, his smile wider than Maya had ever seen.



Maya waited patiently with her grandparents, her stomach fluttering, until the front door finally clicked open. And there they were: Dad, Brenda, and in a soft, striped blanket, the tinniest, most beautiful baby boy, her new little brother, finally home.