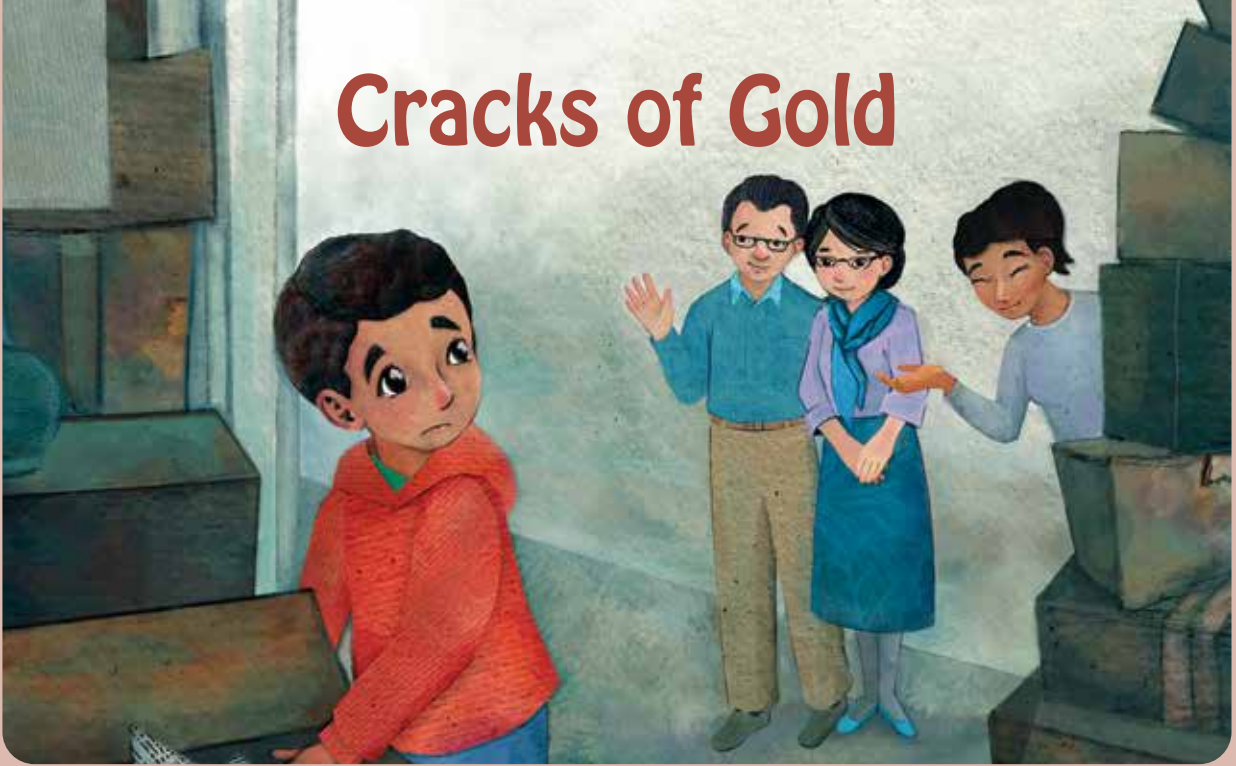


# Cracks of Gold

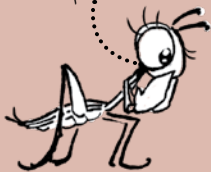


**E**VERYTHING ABOUT MOVING day is a puzzle. I don't know where the boxes should go or anything about our new building on a new street. Our old life is broken into pieces and packed up in piled boxes. I wonder if it will ever fit back together again.

Mom introduces me to our new neighbors, the Satos. Mrs. Sato works with Mom at the job she just started. Mr. Sato helps me push our heavy recliner down the hall. He asks questions about the school I'll be transferring to, but I don't know any of the answers. Mom says it's a fresh start, but it feels broken to me. I just want things to go back to how they were before.

After the first day at my new school, I walk home alone. Mom told me she had to work. I was still hoping she'd meet me after the bell.

Oh no! What happened to your sculptures?



We had put them on the rack to dry.



But while transferring — moving them from one place to another — we dropped them.



by Elizabeth Donnelly  
Art by Elizabeth Goss

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I wiggle the key into our stiff lock, twisting and turning it until the door pops open. Leaving my backpack on a stack of boxes, I flop down on the couch and reach for the remote. As I flip back and forth between boring grownup shows, my stomach rumbles. I wander into the kitchen, ripping tape from the packed boxes while I fumble for a clean plate. My fingers slip, and something goes crashing to the ground. Smash! Porcelain flies

from the folded newspaper and spins across the floor.

“Benjamin!” cries Mom from the doorway. I didn’t hear her come in. “What just broke?” she asks, kneeling to pick up the shards. In her hands, I recognize the shattered pieces. It’s Grandma’s bowl, the one Mom puts out for special occasions. “Why couldn’t you have waited for me to unpack? I can’t believe you broke this,” she says.



My cat is now just shards — broken pieces. ¡Qué pena!



Yes... What a shame.



Alas, my childhood home was broken, as well.





The broom swishes across the kitchen floor. Then the click of Mom’s bedroom door closes behind her. I sneak out into the kitchen and sift through the fragments in the dustbin. There are so many pieces in here, but maybe I could put them back together. Turning the shards, I try to match the pieces, but this bowl will never look the same again.

“I’m sorry I yelled,” says Mom, as she opens her door. “Please just throw out the pieces. We can’t make a fresh start with broken things.”

As I wander down the hall, Mr. Sato is emptying his garbage down the chute. “Are you sure you want to throw that out?” he asks, gesturing toward the bowl.

My throat twists into a knot. “It’s broken,” I whisper. “This is all my fault.”

“Things break, Benjamin. That isn’t anyone’s fault. Besides, this is a simple repair. Come. I’ll show you.”

In their apartment, Mrs. Sato makes me a sandwich while Mr. Sato

Words burst from my mouth and spill across the cramped room. “Well, I can’t believe we have to live here now! I can’t believe I have to switch schools when there are only a few weeks left before summer, and I can’t believe you didn’t even meet me after my first day!” I run into my room, slamming the door behind me.

Shh... I don't think that's what she means, Miro.

I'll never forget that horrible day Sanderson got her... flea collar... and my family all had to... (sniff) had to...

I know! I know! They had to FLEE!

Ouch!

She means zee cat, Sanderson, was housebroken, yes?





spreads the broken pieces out like a jigsaw puzzle. “In Japan, where we come from, there is a beautiful way of mending things. Cracks are not something to hide. You’ll see.”

Taking a thin knife, Mr. Sato spreads lacquer across the sharp edges. He finds two parts that fit and begins to delicately rebuild the curve of the bowl. “Now you try,” he says.

I reach for a long, smooth section and place it at the rim. Slowly, gently, we twist and turn the pieces, finding each match. It’s tricky but also kind

Too bad it isn’t made of wood. Then you could try joinery — the craft of fitting together pieces of wood in woodworking.

I won’t have a sculpture for the final show.



of fun. When our puzzle is complete, the bowl is together again.

“This needs to dry. Come back on Saturday, and we will finish it,” says Mr. Sato.

Saturday morning, I sneak out early and knock on the Satos’ door. “Now comes my favorite part,” says Mr. Sato, as he mixes a tray of lacquer and shimmering gold powder. “This is an ancient technique called kintsugi. In Japanese, the word means ‘golden joinery.’” He offers me a tiny brush. “Take your time, and fill in the crack lines.”

We’ll just have to move on to the next project.

Me, I painted my sculpture with lacquer — a liquid that dries into a hard, shiny, protective coating.





At first my hand is shaking, but then I paint with smooth strokes. When I'm finished, the bowl looks completely different. Instead of the cracks blending in and disappearing, now you can see exactly where it was broken.

"This bowl has another layer to its history—it has been broken, repaired, and is stronger because of it," says Mr. Sato.

I'm a little nervous to show Mom the bowl, but that night I

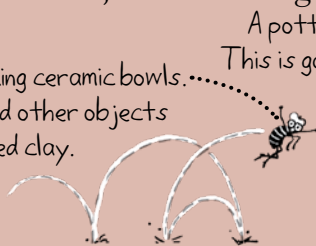
bring it into her room. She runs her fingertip over the golden veins. "Mr. Sato helped me fix it," I say.

"It's so beautiful," she replies. "A new beginning."

I sit on the edge of her bed, and Mom reaches out to me. Our hands join with crisscrossed fingers. Maybe it finally does feel like a fresh start.

"The bowl is stronger like this too," I say. "Now the cracks are what's holding it together." 🐜

Let us now turn to making ceramic bowls. Ceramics are pots and other objects made of baked clay.



A potter's wheel!  
This is going to be fun!



Have you ever thrown a pot before, Bill?



Nope. But I did get thrown into one once.

