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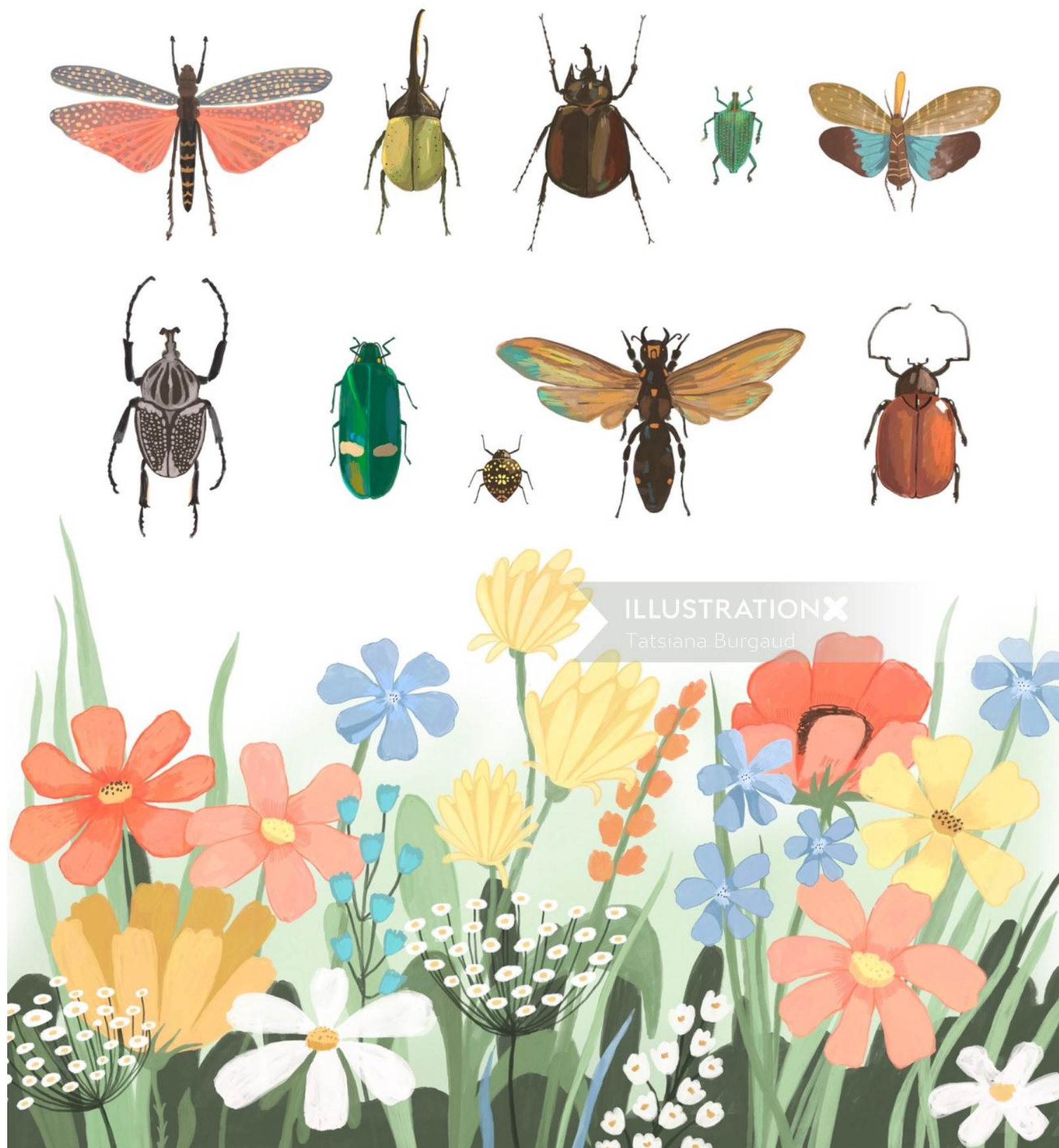
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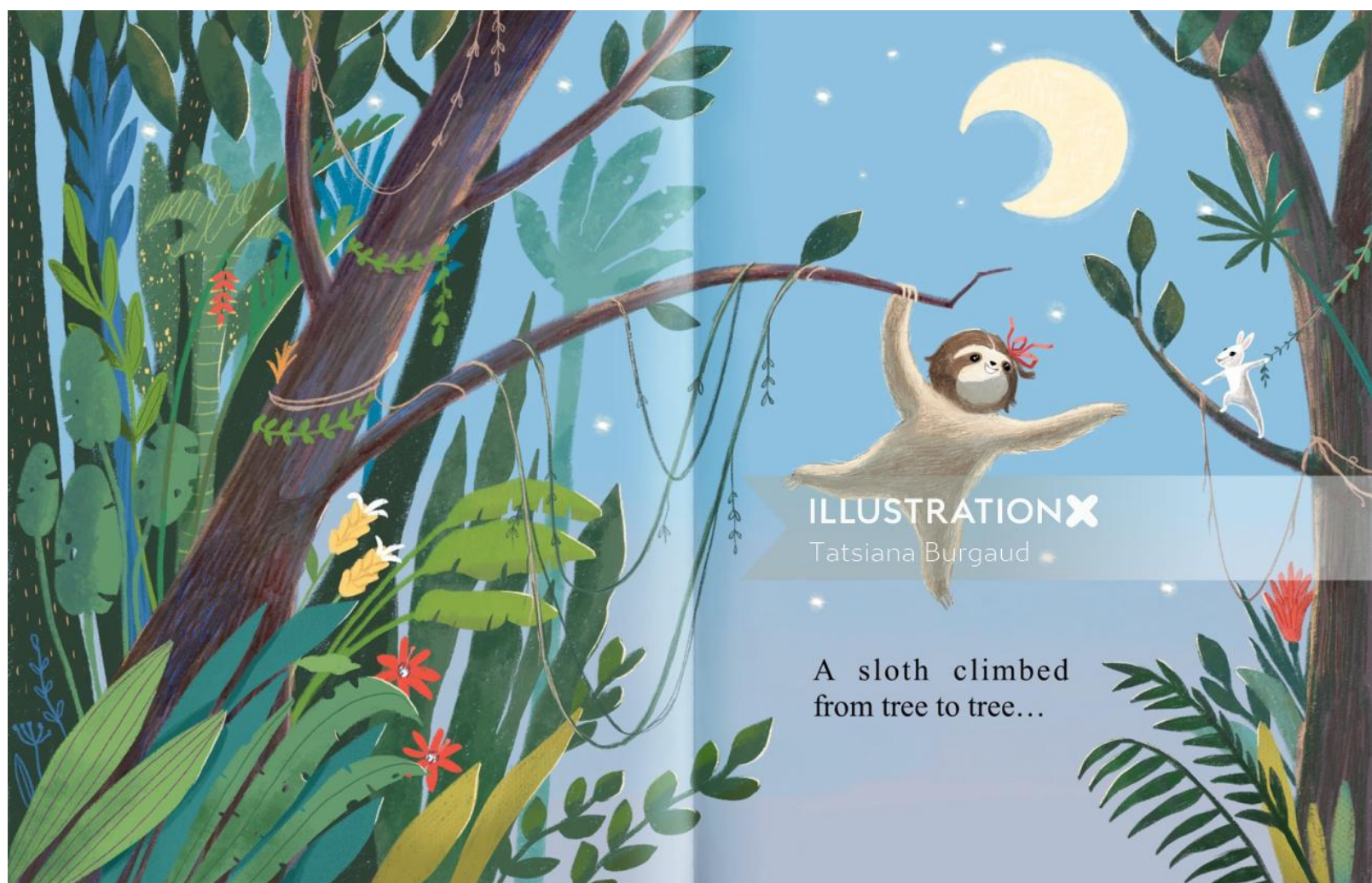
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A sloth climbed  
from tree to tree...



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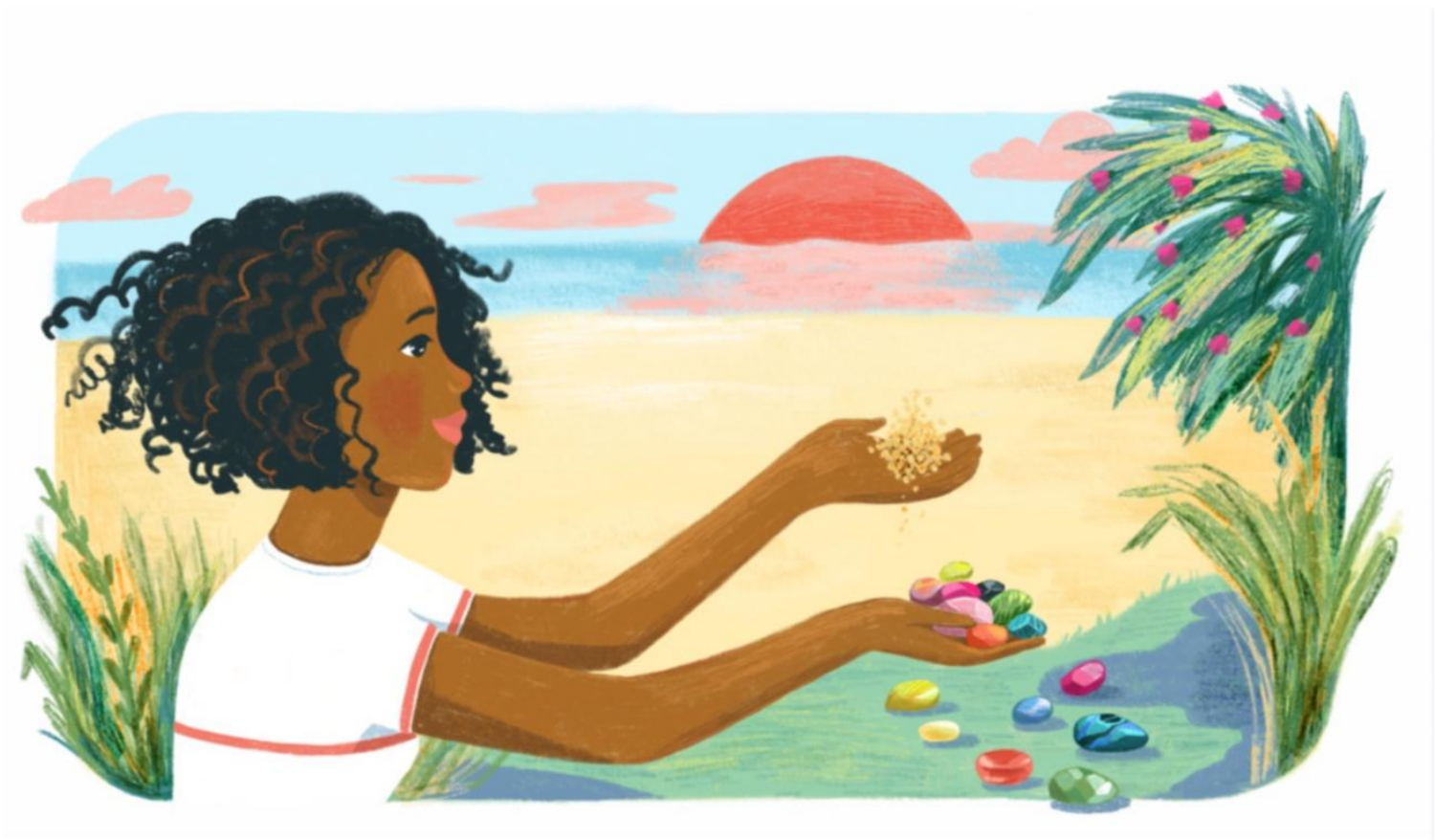
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## Breathing Space

How to free up time for the things that matter most

BY JESSIE MINASSIAN / ILLUSTRATIONS BY TATSIANA BURGAUD

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Something had to give. Just a few weeks into basketball season, Anya could already feel her sanity crumbling. When her friends had begged her to join the basketball team, she worried that it might max out her schedule. But they needed more players—and being on a team with them sounded fun.

Between practices, games, homework, youth group and drama, soon every waking minute was accounted for. The pressure was wearing her down. Had she made a mistake? Should she quit the team? Would quitting disappoint her friends?

Many teens can relate to Anya's dilemma. In fact, when I ask girls what they think is the hardest part of being a teen today, one of the first responses is always "pressure—so much pressure."

One of those pressure points comes from having more things to do than you can get done in a day. The good news is that time-management skills can act like a pressure release valve, giving you breathing space. It's a skill that will serve you well for the rest of your life because, in case you haven't already guessed, adulthood is full of time pressures too.

### How you spend your time

Imagine you have a jarful of those shiny, little gemstones you can buy at souvenir shops, some sand and a jar. If you fill the jar with sand first, all the gemstones won't fit. But if you set the

gemstones in first, the sand will fill all the nooks and crannies and—*voilà!*—it appears to magically fit.

Good time management is about dividing the ways you spend your time. Grab a piece of paper and make two columns: *gemstones* and *sand*. Next, write down all the ways you've spent your time this week.

Activities and responsibilities you *have* to do or *really want* to do go under gemstones. Anya's would be: homework, chores, youth group and the spring musical (she *loves* drama). The less important or more flexible activities go under sand. Anya might write: texting friends, watching YouTube videos, basketball, extra-credit assignments and reading for fun. Understanding these two categories of essential tasks and optional tasks can help you prioritize your time. >



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**My most embarrassing moment** as a high schooler started innocently enough. One weekend after I'd twisted my ankle, the doctor equipped me with a shiny pair of crutches and a fat bandage. I had to hobble my way through the halls at school on Monday. I couldn't believe how long it took me to get from one class to another. As the days progressed, so did my speed. Pretty soon, I was flying by my healthy peers, placing the ends of my crutches far ahead of my body and leaping through the air to land smoothly on my healthy ankle—laughing as I flew past. And then the fall came, magnificent in its glory, in the most crowded of hallways. My crutch slipped, and I flew up in the air. I was a thing of beauty as I tumbled, all grace and arms and bandaged ankle at precarious angles. But my landing was hard. On my bum. The air was sucked from my lungs as I lay on the floor.

The chanting stopped. Everyone stared—some wide-eyed. Me, on my bum, with tears in my eyes because it hurt so bad. I only had a moment to turn this tragedy to my favor. I looked up at the crowd and grabbed an air microphone. "And due to the degree of difficulty and that incredible hard-to-stick landing, we give Elsa a 9.5 out of 10!" I pumped my arms in the air and began to hum, "We are the champions, we are the champions..." The silence changed into warm laughter as a few friends came over to help me up and ask if I was OK. Red-faced, I smiled and got to my feet. While I wasn't always successful in turning my mishaps into humorous moments as a high schooler, I had enough practice to discover a few secrets to keeping a smile on my face.



**Don't take yourself too seriously**  
Embarrassing moments are a banana peel away. They can come as quickly as a wardrobe malfunction or an accidental social media pic post. Sometimes, these situations are out of your control. When that happens, roll with it. Be quick to laugh at yourself so you free up others to laugh with you. The beauty of being able to laugh at your own mistakes is that you'll help others know it's OK to mess up as well. If they see you laugh through a hard moment, you have the ability to laugh at one's self and give them hope.

**Find what is funny**  
If you don't find ways to laugh in your day to day, try going to these potentially humor-filled resources:

**Movies.** There are plenty of funny movies. Rent a good one and sit with your family or friends to watch it. Even when there's tension in family relationships, humor has a way of melting that away as you laugh together at something outside of yourself.

**Stories.** Go ahead and ask: "What's the most embarrassing thing that's ever happened to you?" You don't know what your friends (or your parents) have been through! Take turns sharing the moments that made your face redden, sank your social standing or mortified you in front of someone you wanted to impress. You'll realize that not a single one of us gets through life without something worthy of a hearty chuckle.

**Be endearing**  
I love to be around people who make me laugh. You probably do too. Becoming that type of person means intentionally inviting more humor into your everyday life. Getting there means laughing easily at your own humanity and seeing humor in God's creation and in the creativity of others. While faith and love and service are incredible virtues to pursue, never lose sight of a good sense of humor. Just take a look at the aardvark, the sloth or the blobfish, and you'll know our God has a sense of humor. He fashioned this world with a smile on His face and a twinkle in His eye, simply for our pleasure. And He delights in our celebration of it. //

*Elsa Kok Kokopy is an author and a speaker. She and her husband, Brian, are parents to eight amazing children.*



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