

# BLACKSMITH'S SONG



**Elizabeth Van Steenwyk**  
Illustrated by **Anna Rich**

Thank you President Obama, and Governor Cuomo, for the ACA and the NY State of Health Exchange, which saved my life and allowed me to finish this book.  
—A. R.



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**PEACHTREE**  
ATLANTA



Pa is tired and feverish looking, but he's already up and blowing on the fire when I get up.

"Let me help, Pa," I say.

He doesn't answer and my words drift away like smoke.

His muscles glisten. He's working hard, but the sound from his anvil has no rhythm this afternoon. It's an ordinary song for an ordinary day.

Some evenings, Pa pounds out the blacksmith's song, a deep-down rhythm of hammer striking anvil. The sound grows louder, faster, as his tap, tap, tapping tells listening ears and hearts that the waiting is nearly over.

Tonight he is sending word to the folks in the woods, who are waiting to hear when it's time to leave.

"Ma," I ask. "When will it be our turn?"

"Soon," she whispers. "You be ready when Pa plays for us."

"I'm ready now," I tell her. I'm only nine, but the song of leaving is in my heart too.

That night, sounds scratch at my dreams, trying to get in.

Are the people out there afraid in the darkness?

Will I be brave when it's our turn to go?



The next day, we go about our business. Though he is weak, Pa makes horseshoes and wagon wheels. Ma cooks and serves, and I take care of the chickens.

“Give me all your eggs,” I tell the hens, “so Ma can make lots of cakes for the missus.”

The hens don’t care about cakes. They just care about me taking away what’s theirs. Same as us.

I practice tapping Pa’s rhythms on the henhouse, but it worries the chickens, so I quit.

