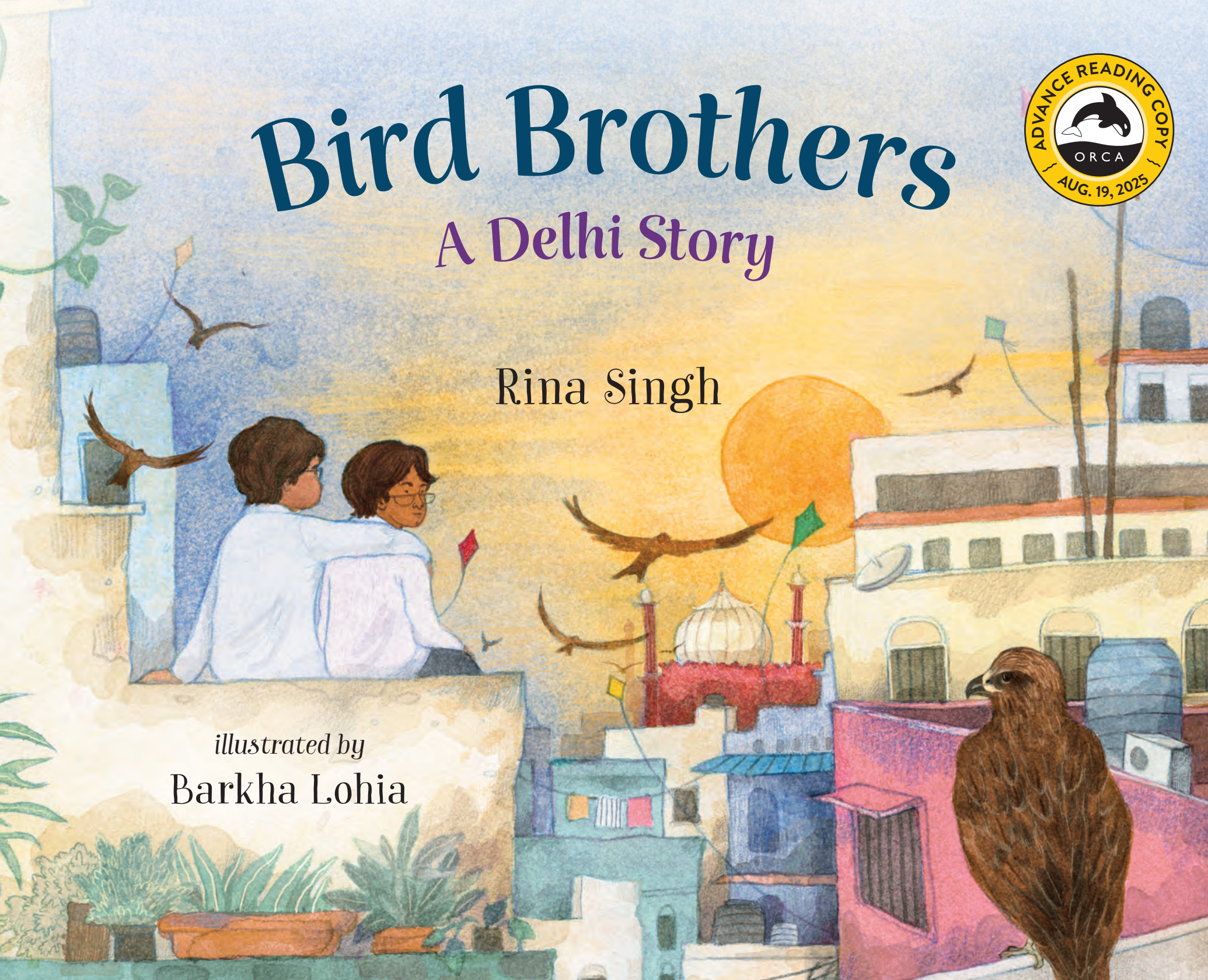
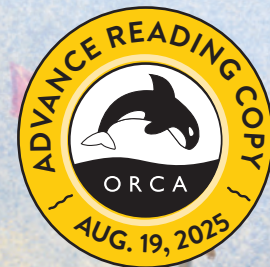


Bird Brothers

A Delhi Story

Rina Singh

illustrated by
Barkha Lohia



Birds belong in the sky

Brothers Nadeem and Saud grew up in Delhi watching the majestic raptors called black kites circle in the sky above their heads. But every year, when paper-kite-flying season came and people brought out their glass-coated kite strings called manja to have friendly battles, the beautiful birds faced dangerous skies. One day, the brothers found a black kite tangled in manja, but no vet could help. As they got older, the brothers never forgot that day. Learning from a local vet, who taught them how to mend a bird's wing, and a neighbor who trained pigeons, they began to rescue and rehabilitate injured black kites.

Bird Brothers: A Delhi Story depicts the powerful true tale of Nadeem Shehzad and Mohammad Saud, who have devoted their lives to helping these birds return to the sky.

Rina Singh is a children's author and slam poetry coach whose curiosity and love for storytelling shape the heart of her books. Rooted in real-life events and the untold stories they hold, her writing spans themes of environmental justice, social change and the magic woven into everyday life. Her critically acclaimed titles include *Grandmother School*, winner of the Christie Harris Illustrated Children's Literature Prize; *Diwali: A Festival of Lights*, nominated for the Red Cedar Award; and *Once, a Bird*. Her picture book *Barefoot Skateboarders* is based on a true story set in rural India.

Barkha Lohia is an Indian illustrator and visual artist based out of Toronto. She enjoys engaging with different forms of storytelling, including picture books, editorials and prints. She can often be found loitering in wild spaces—clicking, collecting and sketching.

PICTURE BOOK • AGES 3-5

Publication: August 19, 2025

FINAL VERSION WILL BE A HARDCOVER

9781459838567 HC \$21.95

9781459839267 PDF • 9781459839274 EPUB

This is an advance reading copy of the uncorrected proofs and is not for sale. Changes may be made to the text before publication, so **all quotations for review must be checked against the final bound book.**

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Bird Brothers, A Delhi Story

Author: Rina Singh

Illustrator: Barkha Lohia

August 19, 2025

A touching picture book based on the real-life efforts of two brothers who have devoted their lives to rescuing and rehabilitating black kite raptors that have been injured by glass-coated kite strings and the dense air pollution in Delhi.

FORMAT

8.75 × 10.75"
32 pages

Hardcover

9781459838567
\$21.95

PDF

9781459839267

EPUB

9781459839274

KEY SELLING POINTS

- When two brothers in Delhi realized that birds of prey called black kites were being injured and no one else was helping, they devoted themselves to learning how to care for and rehabilitate the birds so the black kites could return to the sky.
- Based on the true story of Nadeem Shehzad and Mohammad Saud, who opened up a wildlife rescue clinic in their own home and have devoted their lives to helping black kites. They were also the subject of a documentary film called *All That Breathes*.
- This book encourages readers to problem-solve and envision how they can effect change, even if at first it seems impossible—just like the brothers did when they learned how to help the birds.
- Shows how resilience and compassion can lead the way, as the brothers stand up for the birds despite society's general disregard for them. The brothers create their own path to helping the birds and the environment.
- Rina Singh has spoken with the brothers to craft this story respectfully, and they also sent along some personal photos for the illustrator to refer to.
- Rina Singh's recent nonfiction picture book *Barefoot Skateboarders* is also based on a true story that took place in India.



AMRITA SINGH

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rina Singh is a children's author and slam poetry coach whose curiosity and love for storytelling shape the heart of her books. Rooted in real-life events and the untold stories they hold, her writing spans themes of environmental justice, social change and the magic woven into everyday life. Her critically acclaimed titles include *Grandmother School*, winner of the Christie Harris Illustrated Children's Literature Prize; *Diwali: A Festival of Lights*, nominated for the Red Cedar Award; and *Once, a Bird*. Her picture book *Barefoot Skateboarders* is based on a true story set in rural India.



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

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JNF003030 JUVENILE NONFICTION / Animals / Birds
JNF007110 JUVENILE NONFICTION / Biography & Autobiography / Social Activists
JNF037020 JUVENILE NONFICTION / Science & Nature / Environmental Conservation & Protection

RIGHTS

Worldwide

AGES

3-5

PUBLICITY

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Bird Brothers

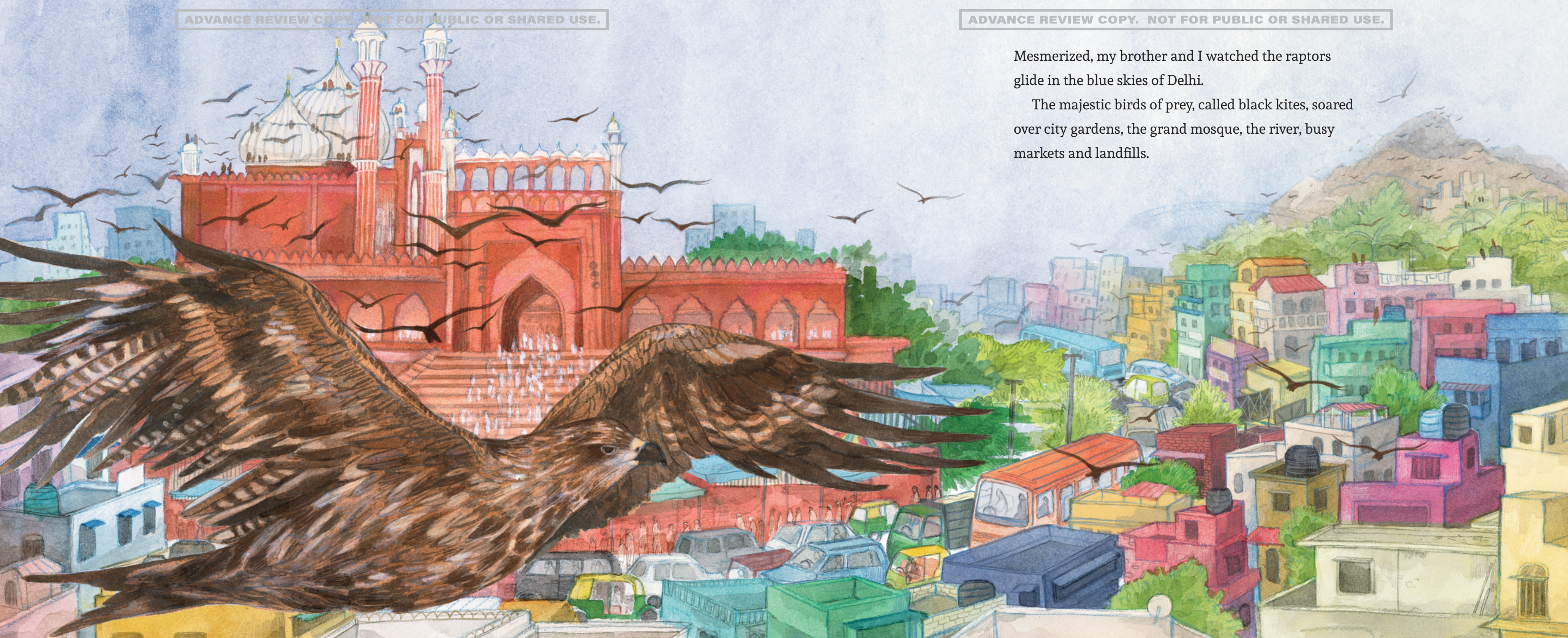
A Delhi Story

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Mesmerized, my brother and I watched the raptors glide in the blue skies of Delhi.

The majestic birds of prey, called black kites, soared over city gardens, the grand mosque, the river, busy markets and landfills.



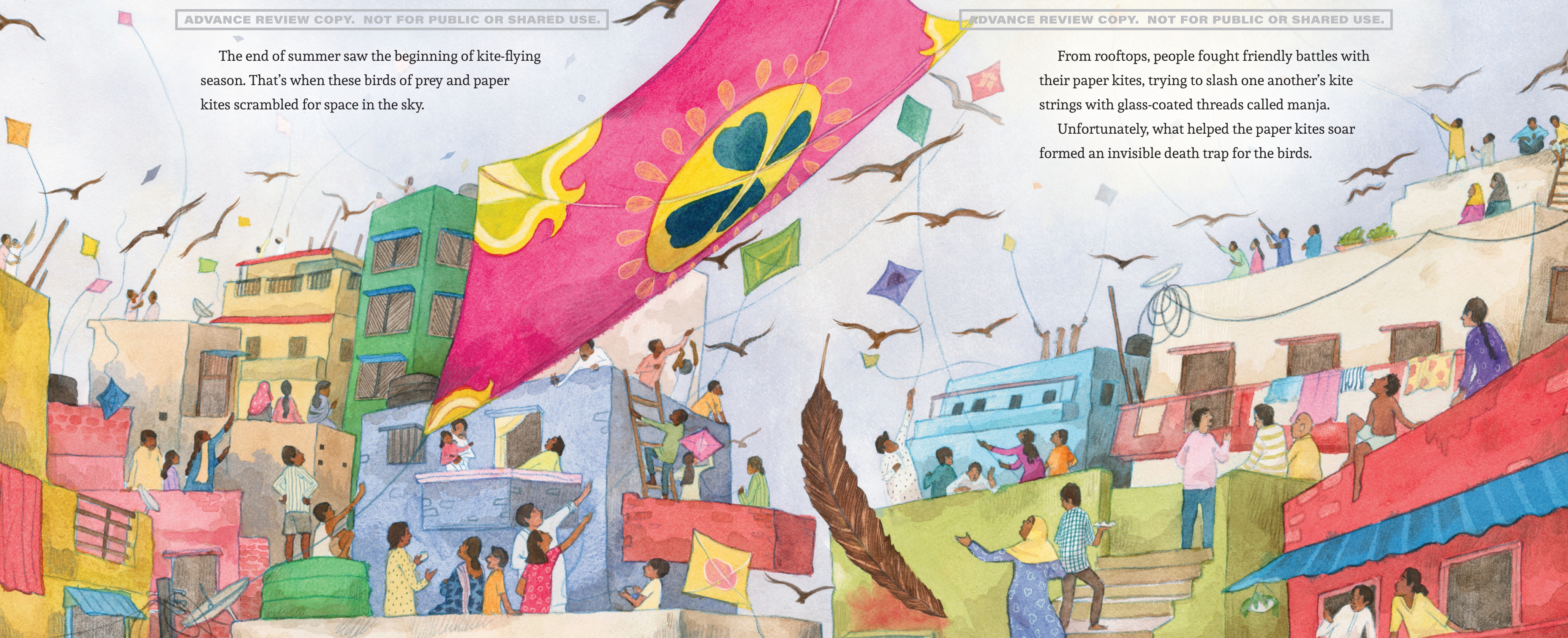
As children, we would watch our father toss raw meat skyward. Hundreds of black kites would then plummet to our rooftop to catch a piece.

Our father said that feeding birds of prey protected us from bad luck.

The end of summer saw the beginning of kite-flying season. That's when these birds of prey and paper kites scrambled for space in the sky.

From rooftops, people fought friendly battles with their paper kites, trying to slash one another's kite strings with glass-coated threads called manja.

Unfortunately, what helped the paper kites soar formed an invisible death trap for the birds.





One day my brother and I saw a black kite tumble out of the sky. We looked at each other. Then we ran and didn't stop till we found the injured bird.

It was tangled in manja. The razor-sharp thread had slashed its wing.

I lifted the bird and felt its small heart racing in my hands.



We rushed to the local bird hospital. The bird was still breathing when we arrived at the door.

But the people at the hospital couldn't help.

"Why?" we asked.

"Because this bird is a carnivore—it eats meat," they said.

"So?" That made no sense to us.

They explained that their hospital only had vegetarian feed, so they couldn't keep it alive.

I cradled the bird in my arms.

I heard no cry of pain.

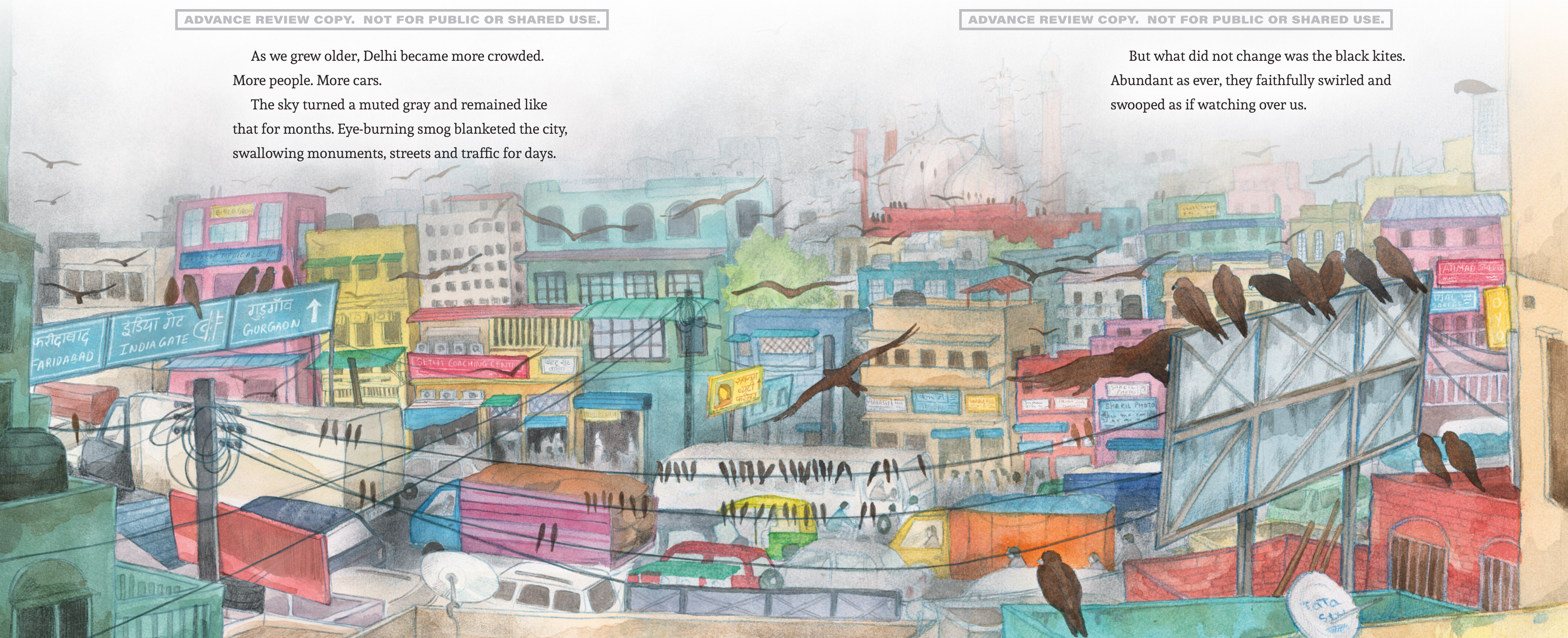
The feathers flickered once, and life disappeared from its body.



As we grew older, Delhi became more crowded.
More people. More cars.

The sky turned a muted gray and remained like
that for months. Eye-burning smog blanketed the city,
swallowing monuments, streets and traffic for days.

But what did not change was the black kites.
Abundant as ever, they faithfully swirled and
swooped as if watching over us.





Over the years my brother and I saw many hurt birds, either crippled by deep cuts or dehydration, or struggling with breathing issues from the toxic air. But we didn't know how to help.

One day we could no longer stand their suffering. We picked up an injured bird, its wings and muscles sliced by the manja, and brought it to a veterinarian.

He patched up the hurt black kite and taught us how to care for it. We took it home and did our best to look after it.



The bird recovered but could not fly again. So it stayed with us till it died twelve years later.

From then on, my brother and I began gathering injured black kites in cardboard boxes and bringing them to our basement.

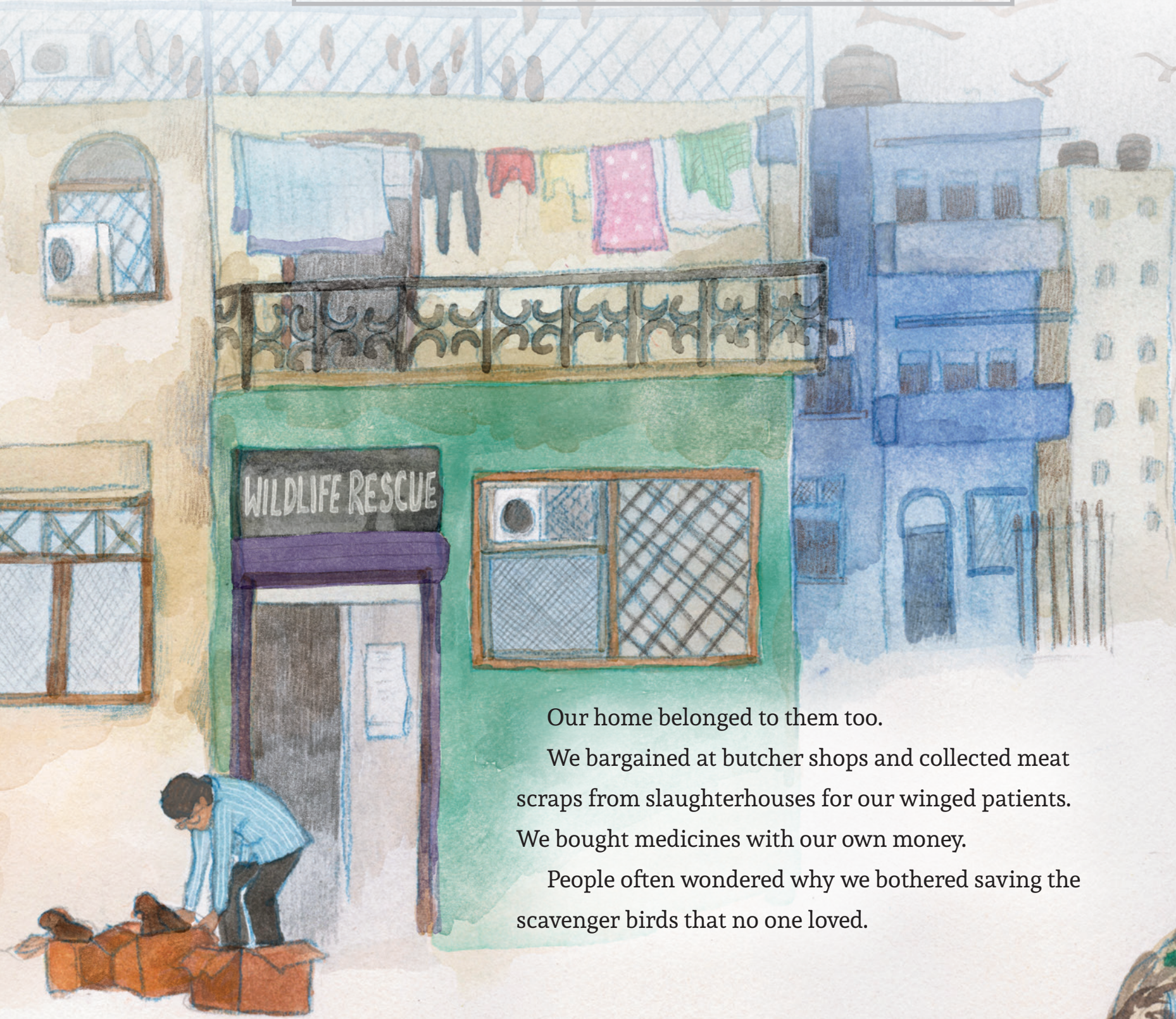
We learned from a neighbor who trained pigeons how to clean and bandage open wounds. We taught ourselves how to nurse the birds to health.



We did delicate wing repairs and surgery to fix bones.
We stitched muscles and reconnected tendons.

The joy of seeing the birds fly again fired an obsession.
The black kites became part of our inner sky.





Our home belonged to them too.
We bargained at butcher shops and collected meat scraps from slaughterhouses for our winged patients. We bought medicines with our own money.
People often wondered why we bothered saving the scavenger birds that no one loved.

If we didn't help the black kites, no one would, we told them.

They didn't know that the city's garbage would reach the skies without these birds.





Word got out about our work.

People began to bring the injured birds to our door.

In our small basement, we treated thousands of them a year.

We built two aviaries on the rooftop. One had a closed top for birds who were recovering. From there they could see the sky and feel the air.

And dream of flying again.

The other aviary was left open for the birds to fly away when they were ready.

Every time a healed bird took flight, my chest nearly burst with joy.





If my chest really did burst open, thousands
of black kites would fly into the sky.

A sky for the birds that is safe and blue.

That is what I wish for.

Every single day.



Author's Note

This is the story of Nadeem Shehzad and Mohammad Saud, who live in Delhi, India's capital and one of the world's most populated cities. These brothers have devoted their lives to protecting the black kite, commonly known as the cheel, a majestic bird of prey that is crucial to the ecosystem of their city.

Yet for more than a decade, these birds have been falling out of Delhi's sky at an alarming rate. As you learned in this story, thousands of black kites are injured every year by manja, the glass-coated nylon thread of a paper kite. A favorite tradition of Delhiites, competitive kite flying is deadly for the birds. (Although Delhi banned manja in 2017, it's still widely available.) But there are other hazards for black kites too. Sometimes they collide with buildings. Other times they choke on the toxic air.

Nadeem and Saud grew up in a working-class Muslim neighborhood where it was common to feed kites meat scraps. This gave them an appreciation for the birds from

a young age. Now their tiny basement is the world's largest rescue facility for black kites. Since 2010 the brothers have nursed more than 26,000 birds back to health. They do delicate wing repairs and surgery to fix bones, suture muscles and reconnect tendons. They also make sure that the birds don't get too attached to humans, so that they maintain their natural behavior.

In recent years the brothers have had invitations from around the world to share their unique knowledge of kite surgery. Since they established Wildlife Rescue, an NGO, they have received donations to support their work. They also have help from friend and volunteer Salik Rehman.

The *New York Times* published an article about them in 2020. In addition, their efforts are the focus of an award-winning documentary called *All That Breathes*.



This one's for Lilo.—R.S.
To my parents and Abhi. —B.L.

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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Bird brothers : a Delhi story / Rina Singh ; illustrated by Barkha Lohia.

Names: Singh, Rina, 1955– author | Lohia, Barkha, illustrator.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20240480376 | Canadiana (ebook) 20240480384 |

ISBN 9781459838567 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781459839267 (PDF) | ISBN 9781459839274 (EPUB)

Subjects: LCSH: Shehzad, Nadeem—Juvenile literature. | LCSH: Saud, Mohammad—Juvenile literature. | LCSH: Milvus—Conservation—India—Delhi—Juvenile literature. | LCSH: Brothers—India—Delhi—Biography—Juvenile literature. | LCGFT: Biographies. | LCGFT: Picture books.

Classification: LCC QL696.F32 S56 2025 | DDC j598.9/450922—dc23

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024944998

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Orca Book Publishers gratefully acknowledges the support for its publishing programs provided by the following agencies: the Government of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts and the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council and the Book Publishing Tax Credit.

Artwork created using a combination of watercolors, oil-based pencils and digital detailing.

Cover and interior artwork by Barkha Lohia.
Design by Rachel Page.
Edited by Sarah Howden.

