

ALL ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD GAO SHENG has ever known are the lush jungles and highlands of her mountain home in Laos. Home is the grassy hill she and her younger siblings roll down after chores. Home is where Ao Ka, their beloved dog, waits for her to return from school each day. Home is where her entire Hmong family—her grandmother, uncles, aunts, and cousins—lives together under one roof. Home is where the peach trees she and her father love grow tall.

But when the communist government takes over Laos in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, Gao Sheng loses the home she's loved for so long. Her father was a captain in the Noble Lao Army, fighting alongside the Americans against the Vietnamese. The new government in Laos will be searching for American allies to punish. If Gao Sheng's father does not leave now, he will be killed.

There's hardly time to say goodbye. But Gao Sheng takes a pouch of peach seeds so that wherever they go, she can one day have a piece of home.

The family makes the difficult journey from the mountains across the dark expanse of the Mekong River to finally arrive in an overcrowded refugee camp in Thailand. As a year passes, Gao Sheng tries to be a good daughter, to take care of her younger siblings, to not ask questions or complain. But Gao Sheng grows tired of waiting—waiting for what will happen to them next and waiting for her parents to truly see how strong she is—even if she is only a girl. As Gao Sheng grows braver, becoming more than the good daughter, she finds her voice and discovers how to build home wherever she is.

In tender, lyrical verse that pulses with emotion, V.T. Bidania tells her family's own story of finding home, highlighting the untold refugee story of the Hmong people, offering new insight into the Vietnam War. In a moment when so many are being displaced, *A Year Without Home* is a timely, necessary read.

V.T. Bidania was born in Laos and raised in St. Paul, Minnesota, where her family re-settled as Hmong refugees after the Vietnam War. Inspired by the magical folktales and real-life stories her grandmothers told her, she wrote her first story at age five and published her first essay in the city newspaper at fifteen. She now writes realistic and historical fiction for kids. Her Astrid & Apollo chapter books are the first children's book series to feature Hmong American characters. They've received starred reviews, been included in the Chicago Public Library's List of Best Fiction for Younger Readers, and were selected as an Amazon Editors' Pick (Best Books for Ages 6–8). In 2026, she'll release a spin-off series, *Extraordinary Eliana*, as well as a short story in *The Beasts Beneath the Winds*, a middle grade anthology about Southeast Asian cryptids. She has an MFA in creative writing from The New School, won a McKnight Writing Fellowship in Children's Literature, and is thrilled to give kids the kinds of books she never had growing up. She lives with her family outside of the Twin Cities.

Read by Robyn Morales



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