

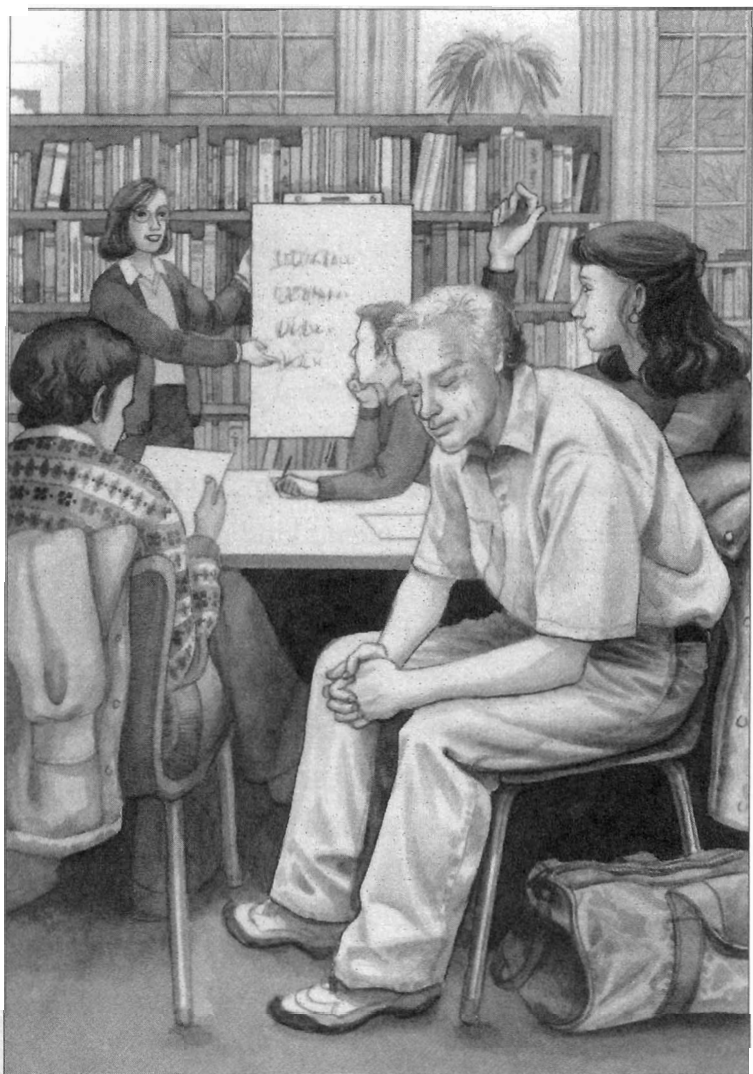
His daughter had told him, “Watch for the building with the big rabbit and turtle beside the doors.” And there it was.

Mr. Elliot soon found himself in a room with four other people, all adults, who looked just as scared as he felt. Mr. Elliot’s heart thumped. Could he really put himself through all this again? The struggling over letters and words? The humiliation of getting them wrong?

Mr. Elliot sat on the edge of his chair squeezing his hands between his knees, hoping the teacher would not ask him any questions, or worse, ask him to read.

“Good afternoon, everyone,” a dark-haired woman said. “My name is Brenda. I’m going to be your teacher.”

After the students introduced themselves, the teacher showed them how to write the words *I can*. Everyone copied the words on the first page of their notebooks. They wrote *I can* three times. Then the teacher asked each of the students how



they would finish an *I can* sentence. She wrote down the words for each sentence on a chart.

“Would someone like to try to read any of the sentences?” Brenda asked.

Mr. Elliot kept his eyes in his lap so she wouldn’t ask him.

The tall woman beside him, who had told the class she could read a little, raised a finger.

“Lorraine? Good for you.”

Lorraine began to read. “I can . . . make . . . a boat. I can . . . kick — I mean, kind . . . No, it’s . . . um . . .”

Mr. Elliot cringed, but no one in the class laughed. And the teacher didn’t shout or wave a ruler.

“That’s a hard one,” Brenda said, “because this ‘k’ is silent. It says, ‘I can knit socks.’”

Mr. Elliot went home that day with three sentences to study —

I can push a broom.

I can kick a ball.

I can play harmonica.

As he coasted home on his bike, he thought,
Maybe — just maybe — I can learn to read.