



Project by: - Aayushi Gawde, Anayaa Mehta, Shinead Cowan, Trisha Srivastava, Vrittee Shah



The Weight She Knows

A story of two siblings, a whispered truth, and how shared work led to shared freedom.



Shardul: Courage of True Colors

5 GENDER EQUALITY

Authors: Annu Datta, Anshika Godsekar, Beeta Monika, Anshika School, Dr. Kalindi Sharmas High School, Bangalore

STORIES

from City as Lab

Unseen Threads: The Many Faces of Gender Inequity

2025-2026



Wings Against the Wind: My Fight for Education

Illustrators: Karishma Pawar and Sahil Chavan
Mentors: Ishika Bansal and Karan Yargolkar
Zameer Foundation

Preface

The theme for the CaL Story Project 25-26 was
“Unseen Threads: The Many Faces of Gender Inequity”

In today’s India, where conversations about equality are growing louder, yet deep-rooted biases continue to shape everyday lives, examining gender inequity is both urgent and necessary. For young people especially, understanding how power, opportunity and social norms shape lived realities is key to building a more just and compassionate society.

These four books explore the many faces of gender inequity - how it is experienced, resisted, internalised, and challenged in everyday life. Through personal narratives drawn from real people in their own communities, the young

authors examine themes of identity, exclusion, courage, and fairness, inviting readers to see how gender shapes opportunities, relationships, and self-worth.

Researched, written and illustrated by middle and high school students from JBCN International School, Dr. Kalmadi Shamarao High School (Ganeshnagar), Zameer Foundation, and Badri High School (Indore), these books remind us that meaningful change begins with listening, empathy and the courage to tell stories that matter.



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Unseen Yet Unbroken

JBCN International School, Borivali

Authors: Aayushi Gawde, Anayaa Mehta, Shinead Cowan,
Trisha Srivastava, Vrittee Shah

Mentor: Sharon Rozario

**We would like to thank Roshni
and her team for sharing her
story with us. This wouldn't
have been possible without
you.**




Working on a photo book turned out to be one of the most memorable experiences for me. Working closely with my friend made the process exciting, and together we managed to overcome the challenges that came along. While working on it, I learned many things and also used my creativity to make the book look nice. I am very thankful to our respected mentor, Ms. Sharron, who guided us with patience and encouragement throughout the project. We chose this person for our project because I see them every day while going to school, and I notice that society does not give them the same respect. Through our photo book, I wanted to bring attention to this issue and inspire people to think differently.

-----AAYUSHI



Making a picture book on this topic changed a part of me and I feel that everyone should be allowed to put their own perspectives forward and each one has a different viewpoint but that doesn't give us the right to categorize them into what we want them to be. They are their own selves and happy how they are so we as a community should empower them and let them choose their future. I feel grateful and thankful for this opportunity as this has taught us inclusivity and respect for all. Because of this picture book we aim to change how the society perceives them and we want them to get the respect they deserve.

----ANAYAA



Creating this picture book has truly transformed me. It reminded me that every individual has their own perspective, and each viewpoint is valuable. No one should be forced into categories or labels that society imposes—because they are unique, complete, and content as they are. As a community, our role is to uplift them, to give them the freedom to shape their own future. I am deeply thankful for this opportunity, as it has taught us the importance of inclusivity and respect for all people. Through this book, our hope is to shift how society sees them, so they are recognized with dignity and given the respect they rightfully deserve.

-----SHINEAD



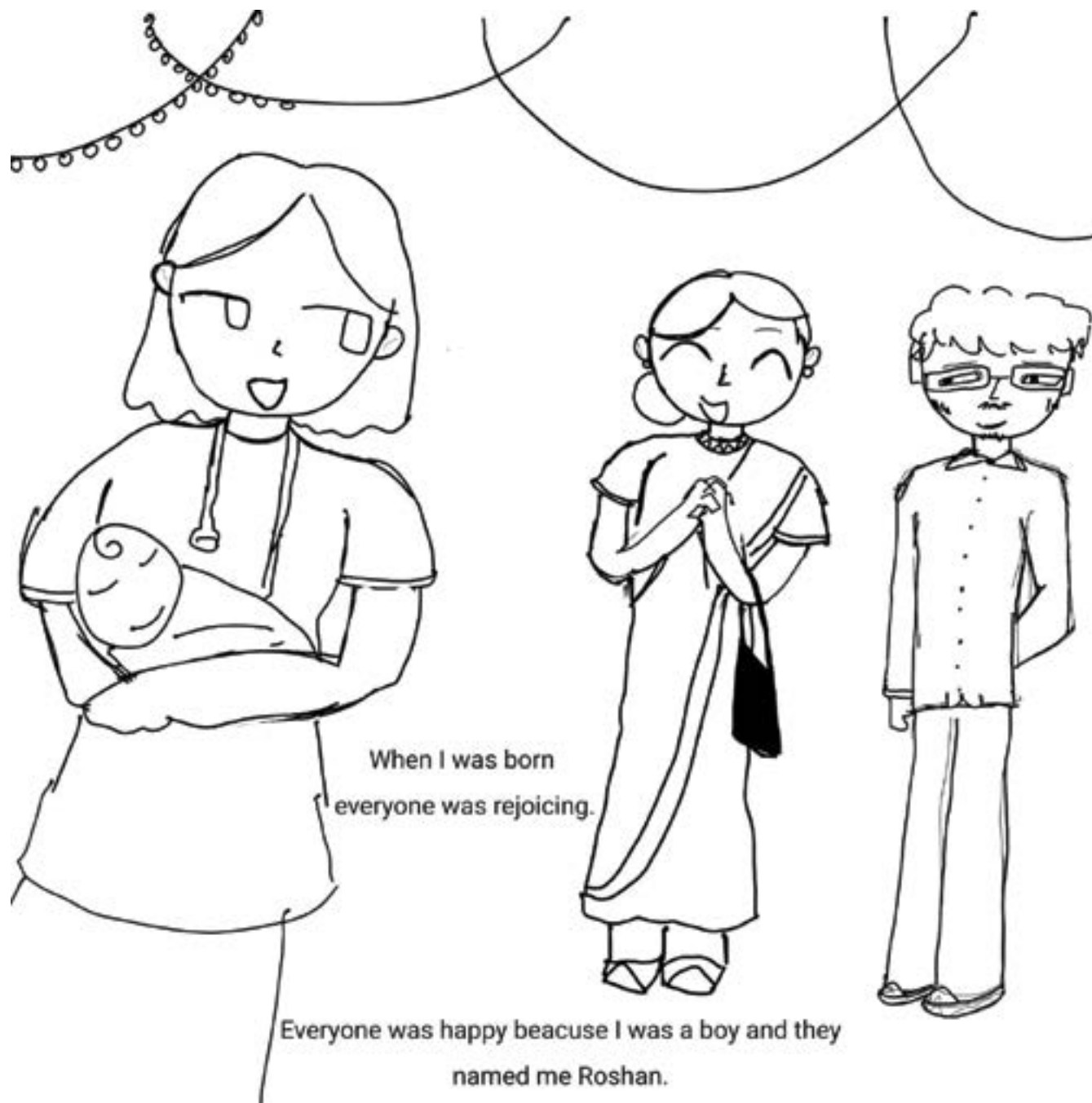
Creating this comic about a transgender individual's journey has been a moving experience. Her story of rejection has left a lasting impact on me . I can't imagine the pain of being kicked out of our own home, forced to navigate a world that often feels hostile and unwinding. I am in awe of her strength and determination. My hope is that sharing her story will spark empathy and understanding, inspiring others to create a more loving world. I am grateful for getting guidance from a lovely mentor and I am grateful getting the opportunity to amplify Roshni's voice and shed light on the challenges faced by the transgender community.

-----TRISHA



Making this comic about a transgender person's journey has touched me deeply. Roshni's story of being rejected and losing her home is something I cannot imagine going through. The world can feel unkind, yet she showed amazing courage and strength. I hope that by sharing her story, people will feel more empathy and kindness, and together we can build a more loving society. I am thankful to my mentor for guiding me, and I feel grateful for the chance to share Roshni's voice and bring attention to the struggles faced by the transgender community.

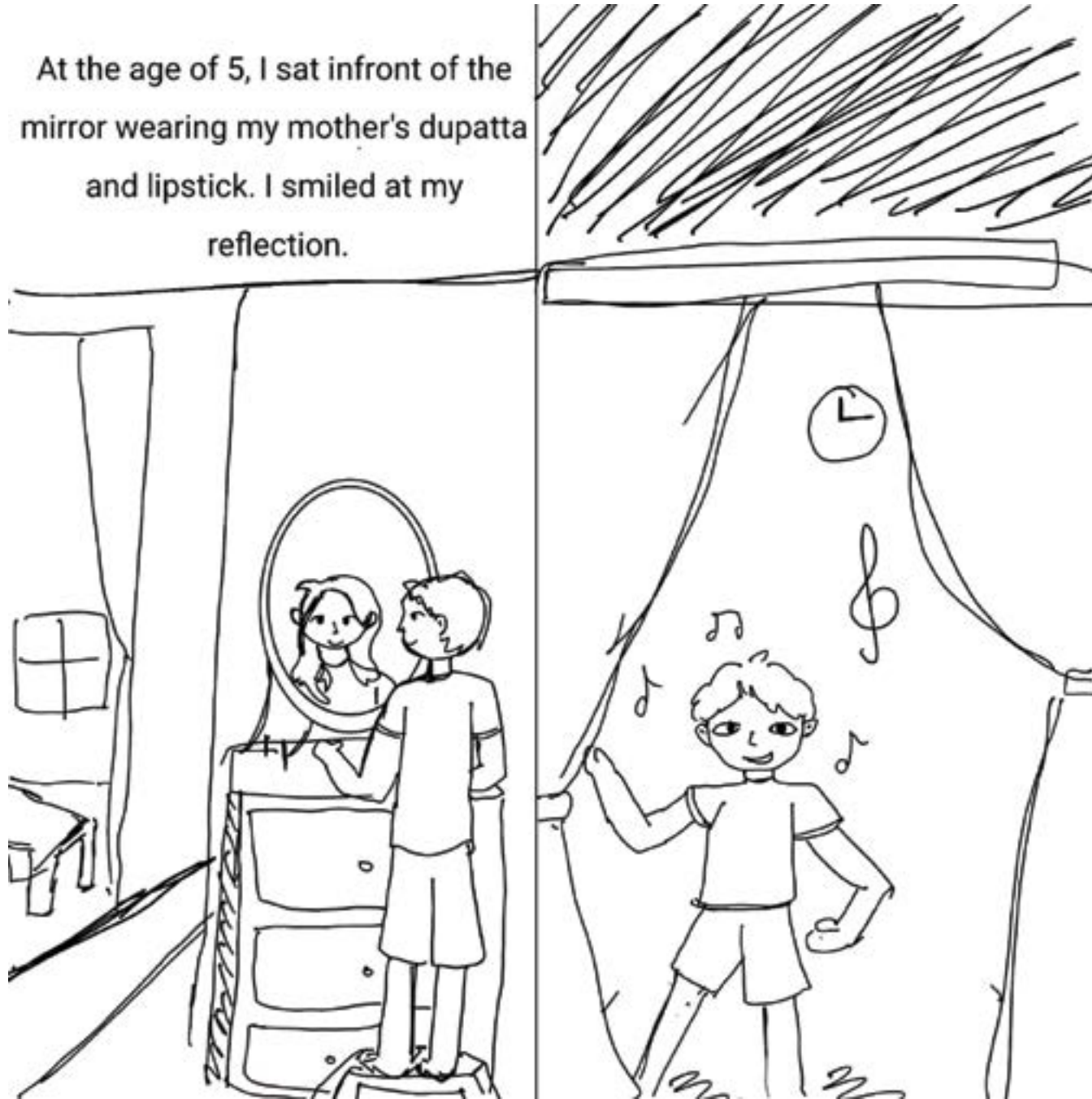
-----VRITTEE



When I was born
everyone was rejoicing.

Everyone was happy because I was a boy and they
named me Roshan.

At the age of 5, I sat in front of the mirror wearing my mother's dupatta and lipstick. I smiled at my reflection.



I didn't know
what I was
doing
wrong. It felt
right until the
world told me
it wasn't.

At five, I sat in the
front of the mirror,
wearing my mother's
dupatta and lipstick. I
smiled at my
reflection





Everyone bullied and teased me
cause I walked like a girl!



I silently cried in the
bathroom.



Tears were the only language
that understood me.





I wasn't thrown out but I was set free into
loneliness.

Nights were cold, the bed was rough and hunger was sharper.

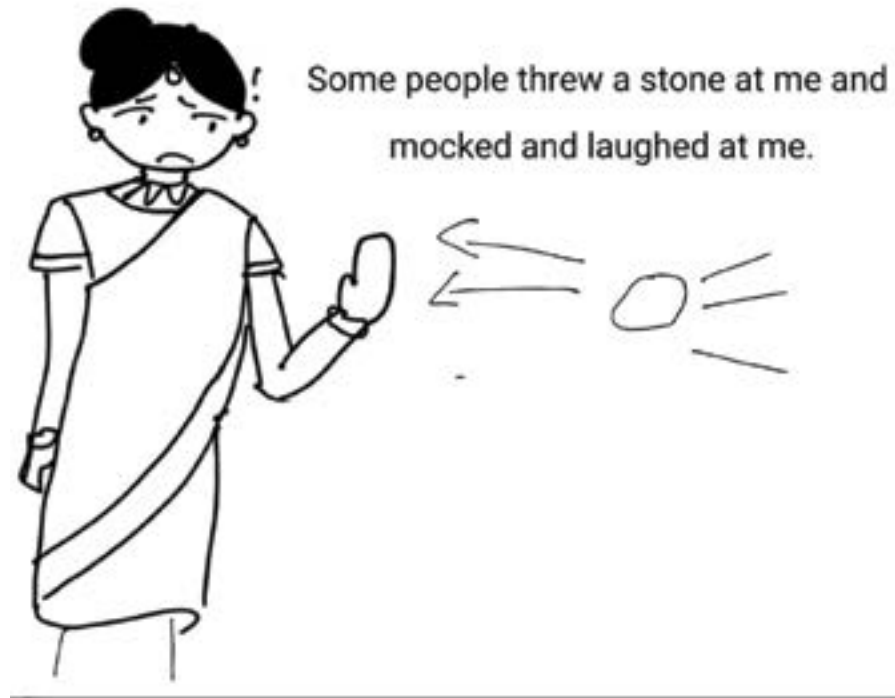
When the stomach aches, even comfort feels like a luxury.



I met people with similar problems. They noticed me even
when the world didn't.

For the first time 'different' did not mean wrong.





MEDICINE

One day, I was hurt and I couldn't afford medicine for myself. I realized that the pain caused me more than the money. My body healed slower than my heart.



A child once asked me, "Are u a girl or a boy?" Before I could reply his mother dragged him off. It disheartened me to see how even little children were taught to look at us differently.



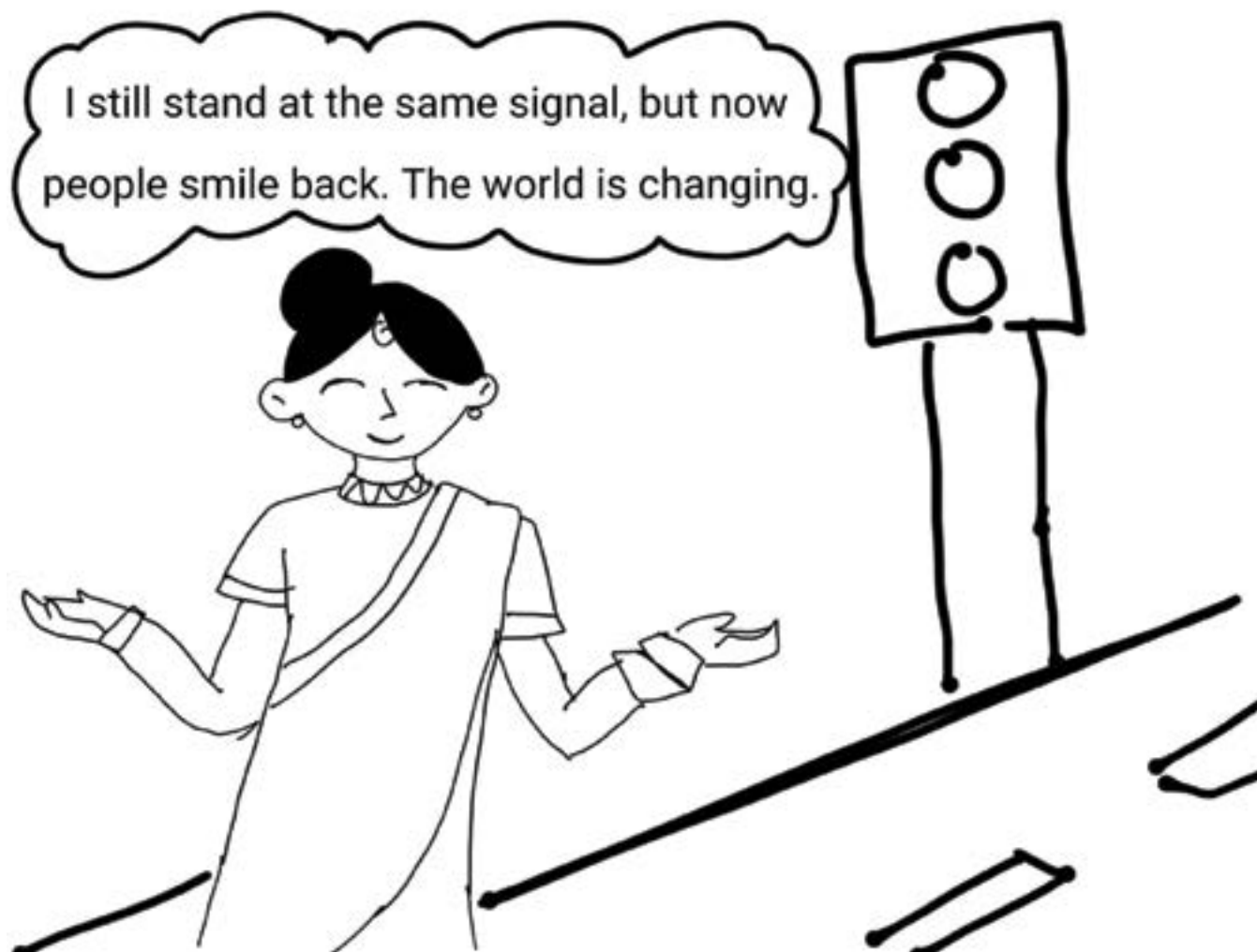
I gazed dejectedly upon a world that had
constantly rejected me. But we deserve
Respect, Dignity and Rights.



I begged at the traffic signal just to get money for food and to survive. Many ignored me, some told me off and others smiled kindly but walked away.



Slowly I saw people trying to understand us by having many awareness programs and films and art based on us. I started believing that change moves quietly and slowly but it definitely moves.

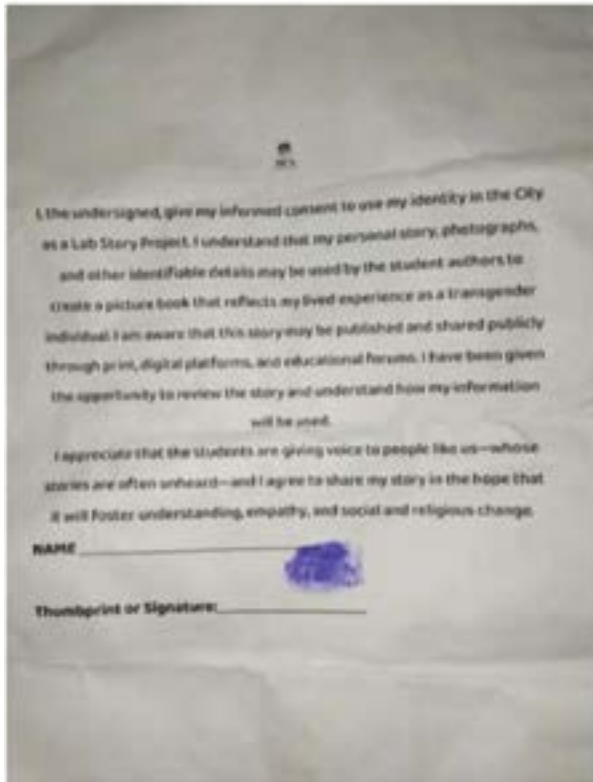


There are many people like me still waiting. I am
Roshni still shining. I am not a shadow. I am the
light. That's how my name from Roshan changed to
Roshni.



Many transgender people in India live between moments of kindness and moments of pain. Sometimes, they are accepted and treated with respect. Other times, they face discrimination, teasing, and sadness. Their lives show great strength, because they continue to move forward even when life is difficult.





Rationale

One morning, while Vrittee was on her way to school accompanied by her father, they had an unexpected encounter that left a lasting impression. As they were navigating through the bustling streets, a transgender individual approached them, politely asking for money. What caught Vrittee's attention immediately was that the person spoke fluent English, something not commonly expected.

Her father was visibly surprised and questioned the individual. "If you're so well-spoken and clearly educated," he asked, "then why don't you find a job instead of begging on the streets? The individual took a pause and calmly said " many people assume that being a member of the transgender community means we're unnatural. This issue closely reflects my experiences as a transgender individual. Like many others in my community, I often face unsupportive environments from family and society, experiencing rejection, disrespect, and social exclusion. These challenges make it difficult to access education, employment, and acceptance. Despite these struggles, I am still expected to fulfill societal obligations, such as paying taxes, even when I lack stable housing or support. This highlights the broader societal difficulties we encounter in our pursuit of acceptance and equal rights."

Later that day, Vrittee shared the experience with us. What began as a simple story turned into a deep, eye-opening conversation. They talked about identity, rejection, and how people are often judged not by who they are..

Reflections

Creating this picture book has truly transformed me. It reminded me that every individual has their own perspective, and each viewpoint is valuable. No one should be forced into categories or labels that society imposes—because they are unique, complete, and content as they are. As a community, our role is to uplift them, to give them the freedom to shape their own future. I am deeply thankful for this opportunity, as it has taught us the importance of inclusivity and respect for all people. Through this book, our hope is to shift how society sees them, so they are recognized with dignity and given the respect they rightfully deserve.

Shinead Cowan

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Aayushi Gawde



Creating this book about a transgender individual's journey has been a moving experience. Her story of rejection has left a lasting impact on me. I can't imagine the pain of being kicked out of our own home, forced to navigate a world that often feels hostile and unwinding. I am in awe of her strength and determination. My hope is that sharing her story will spark empathy and understanding, inspiring others to create a more loving world. I am grateful for getting guidance from a lovely mentor and I am grateful getting the opportunity to amplify Roshni's voice and shed light on the challenges faced by the transgender community.

Trisha Srivastava

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Vrittee Shah

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Anayaa Mehta

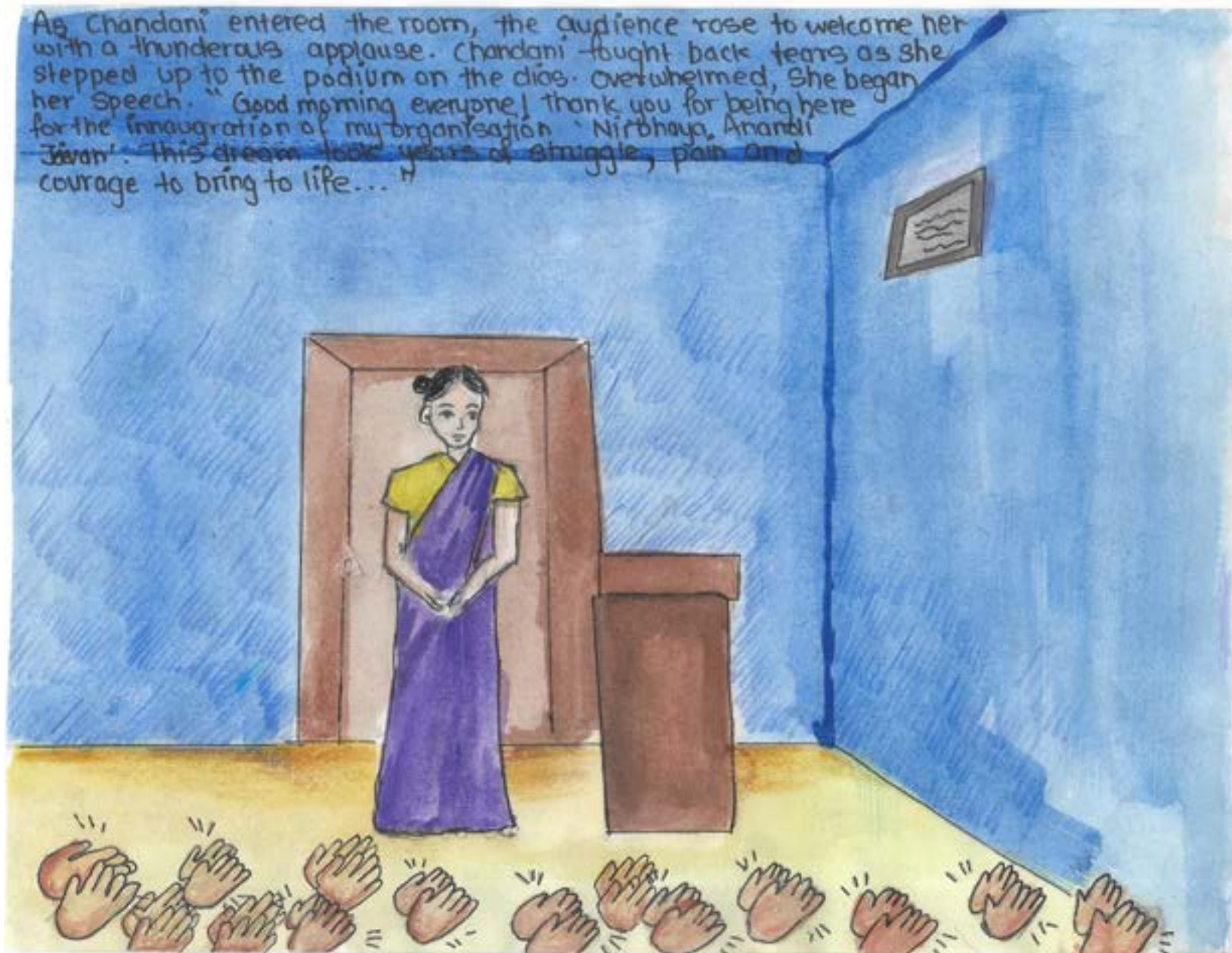


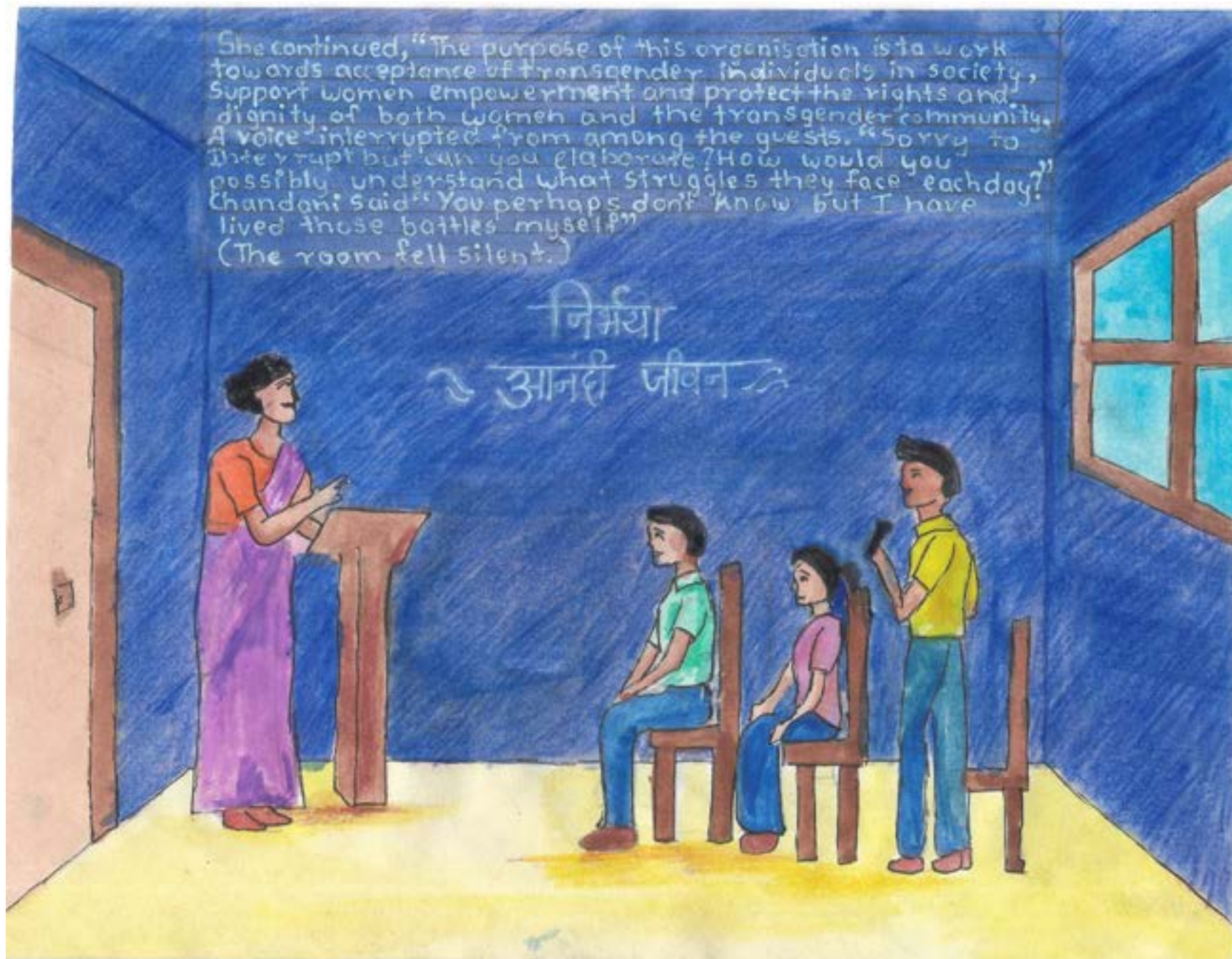
Chandni: Courage of True Colors

Dr. Kalmadi Shamarao High School, Ganeshnagar

Authors: Annavi Chitre, Anushka Gudmewar

Mentor: Monisha Abhyankar



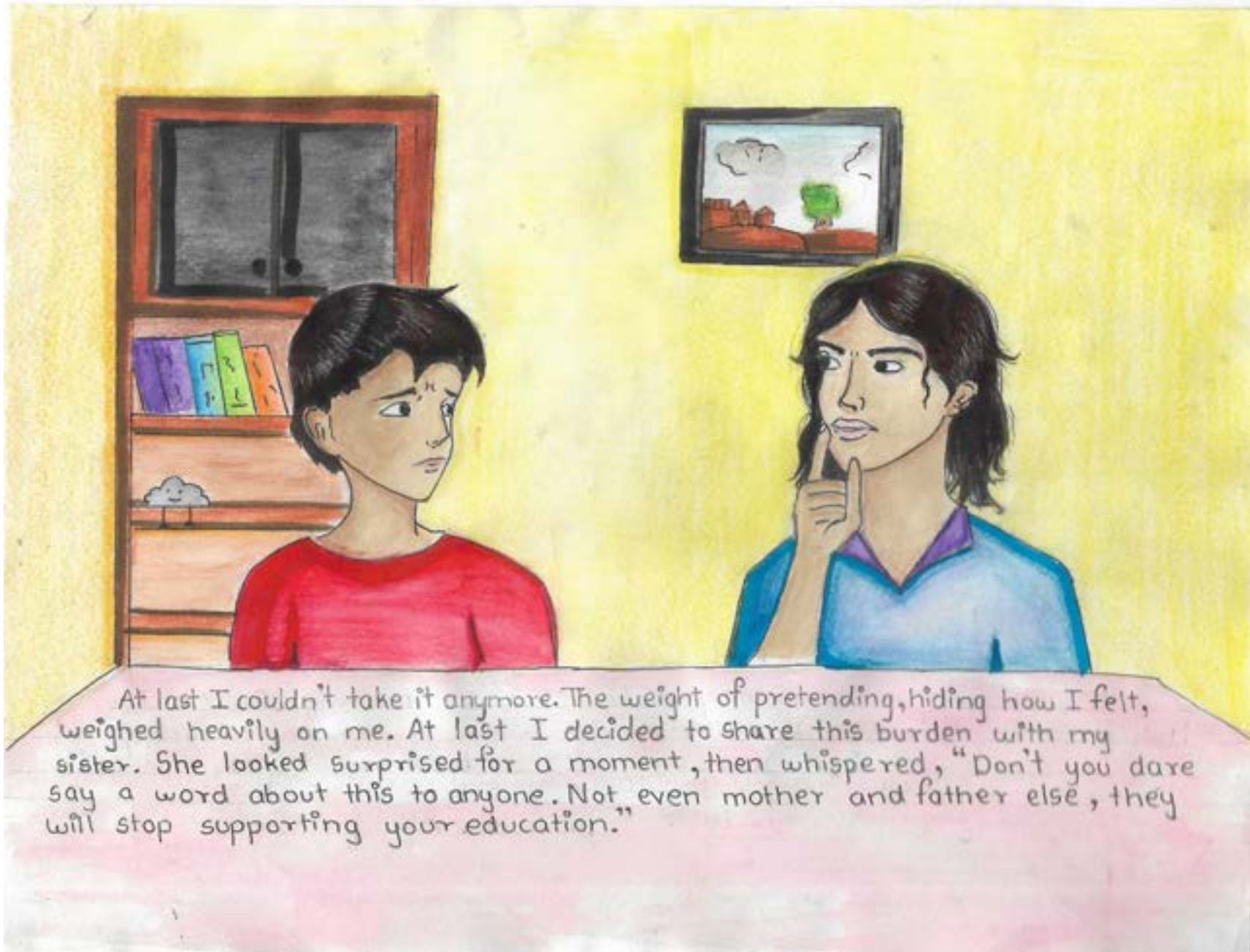


I was nine years old. I stood behind the door, wearing half pants, a plain shirt and my hair cut short watching my mother combing her long beautiful hair. I was captivated by watching her set her hair into a braid. But as I watched, I felt a sudden heaviness in my heart.

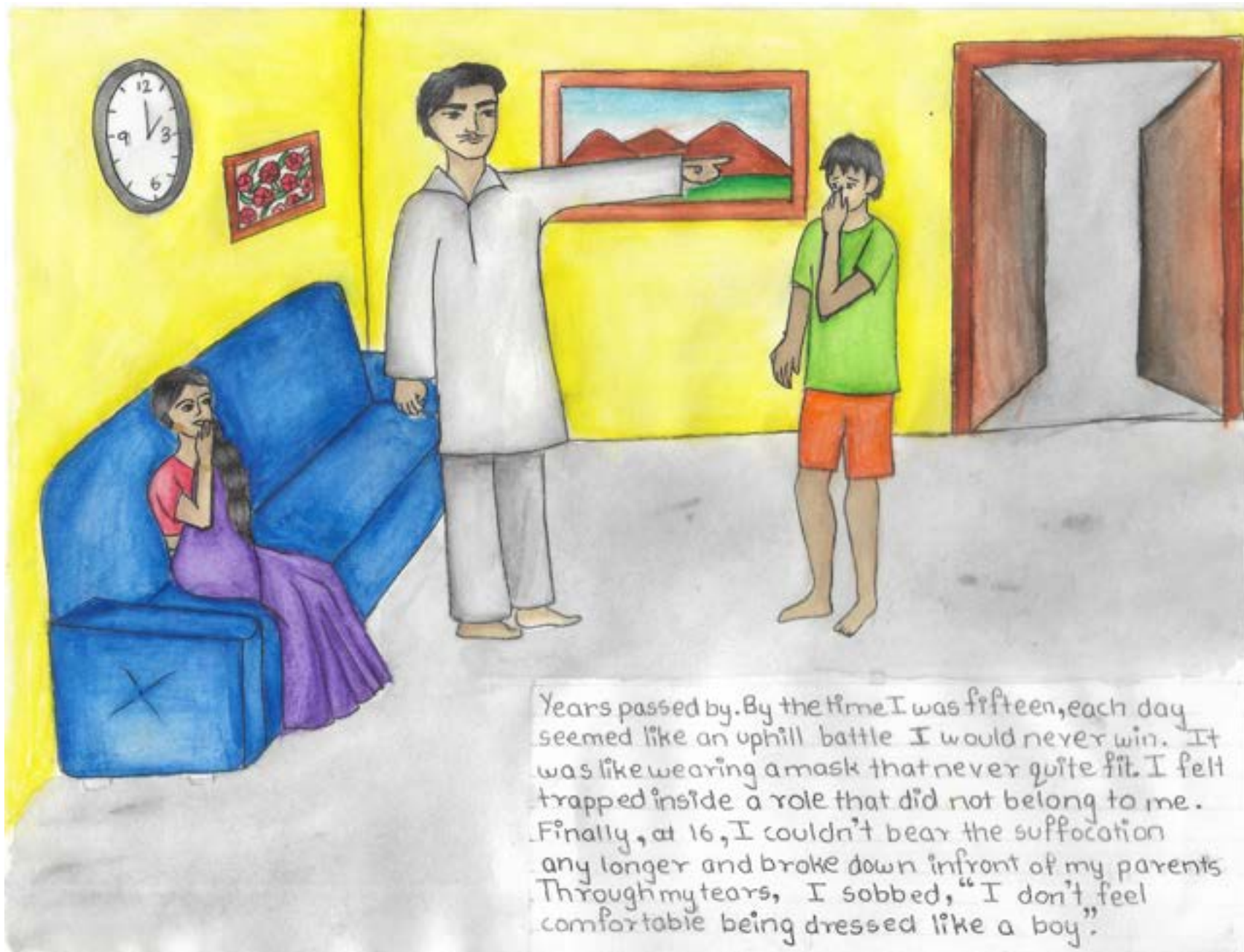


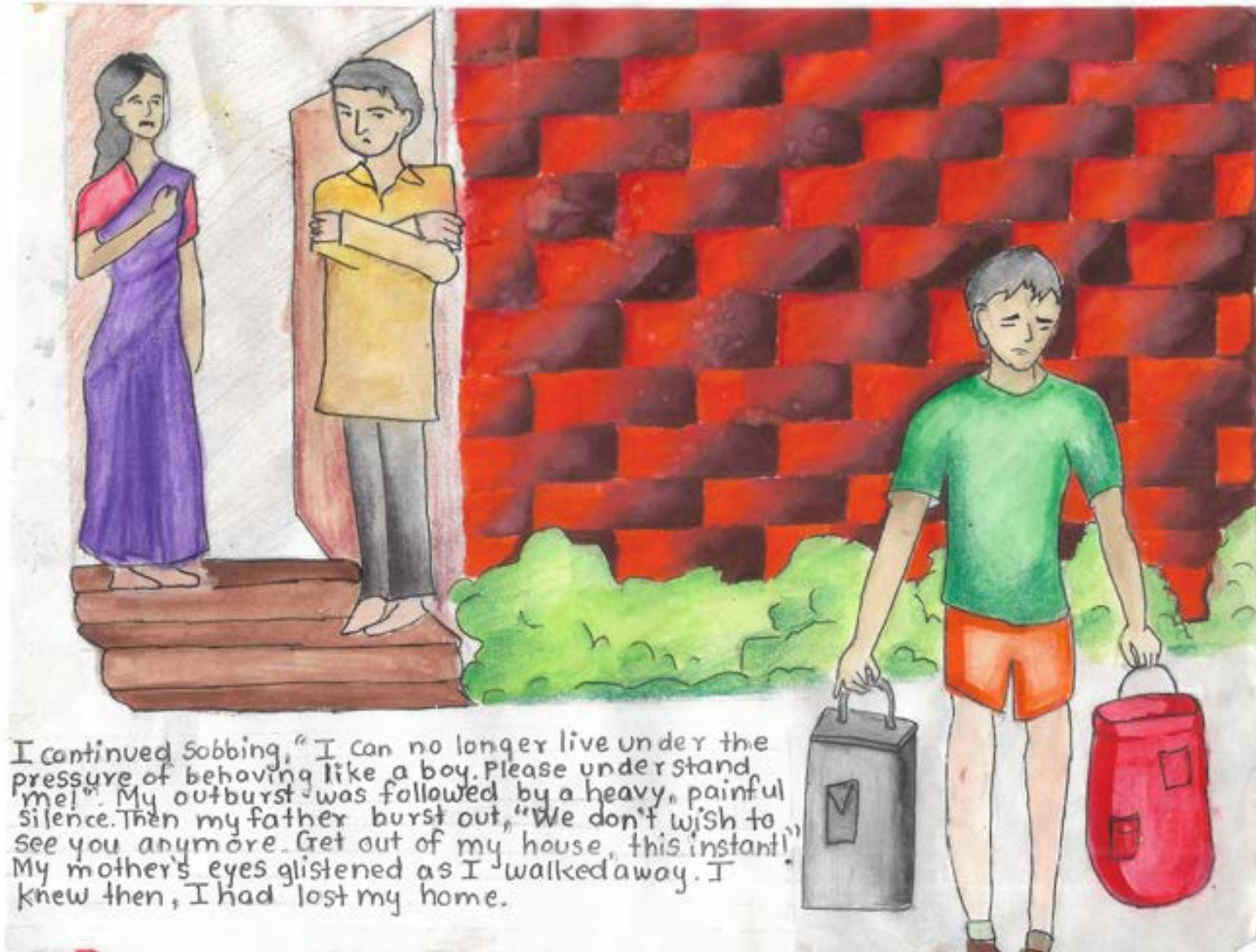
I ran to my room. I felt pressurized thinking of my desires, prohibited actions and wondering 'Why can't I have long hair?' 'Why am I not allowed to wear a saree and put bindi?' 'Why am I not allowed to do the things my heart so desires?' 'Why do I feel something inside me is familiar yet forbidden?' My head was pounding with all these questions to which I did not know the answer.





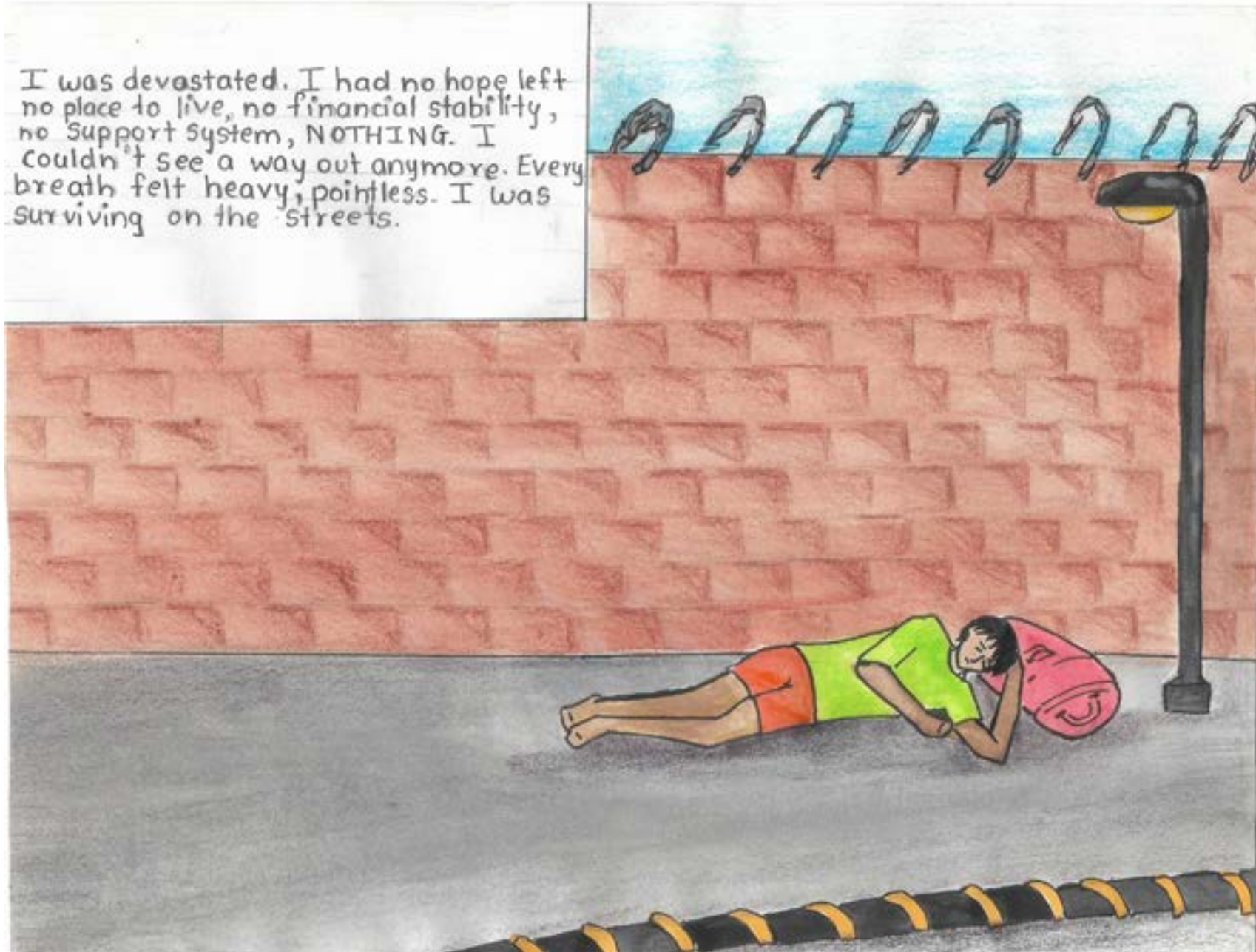
At last I couldn't take it anymore. The weight of pretending, hiding how I felt, weighed heavily on me. At last I decided to share this burden with my sister. She looked surprised for a moment, then whispered, "Don't you dare say a word about this to anyone. Not even mother and father else, they will stop supporting your education."



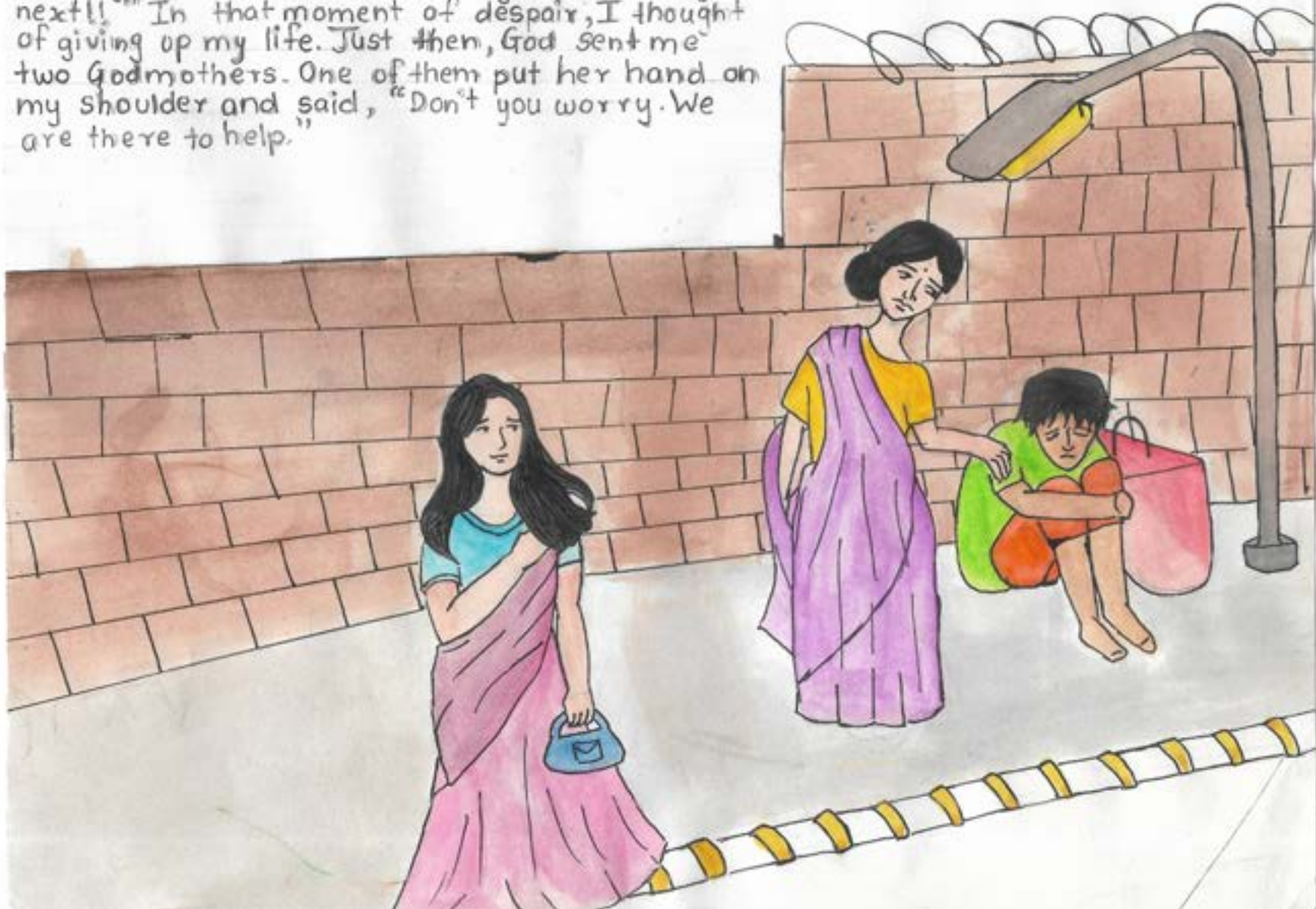


I continued sobbing, "I can no longer live under the pressure of behaving like a boy. Please understand me!" My outburst was followed by a heavy, painful silence. Then my father burst out, "We don't wish to see you anymore. Get out of my house, this instant!" My mother's eyes glistened as I walked away. I knew then, I had lost my home.

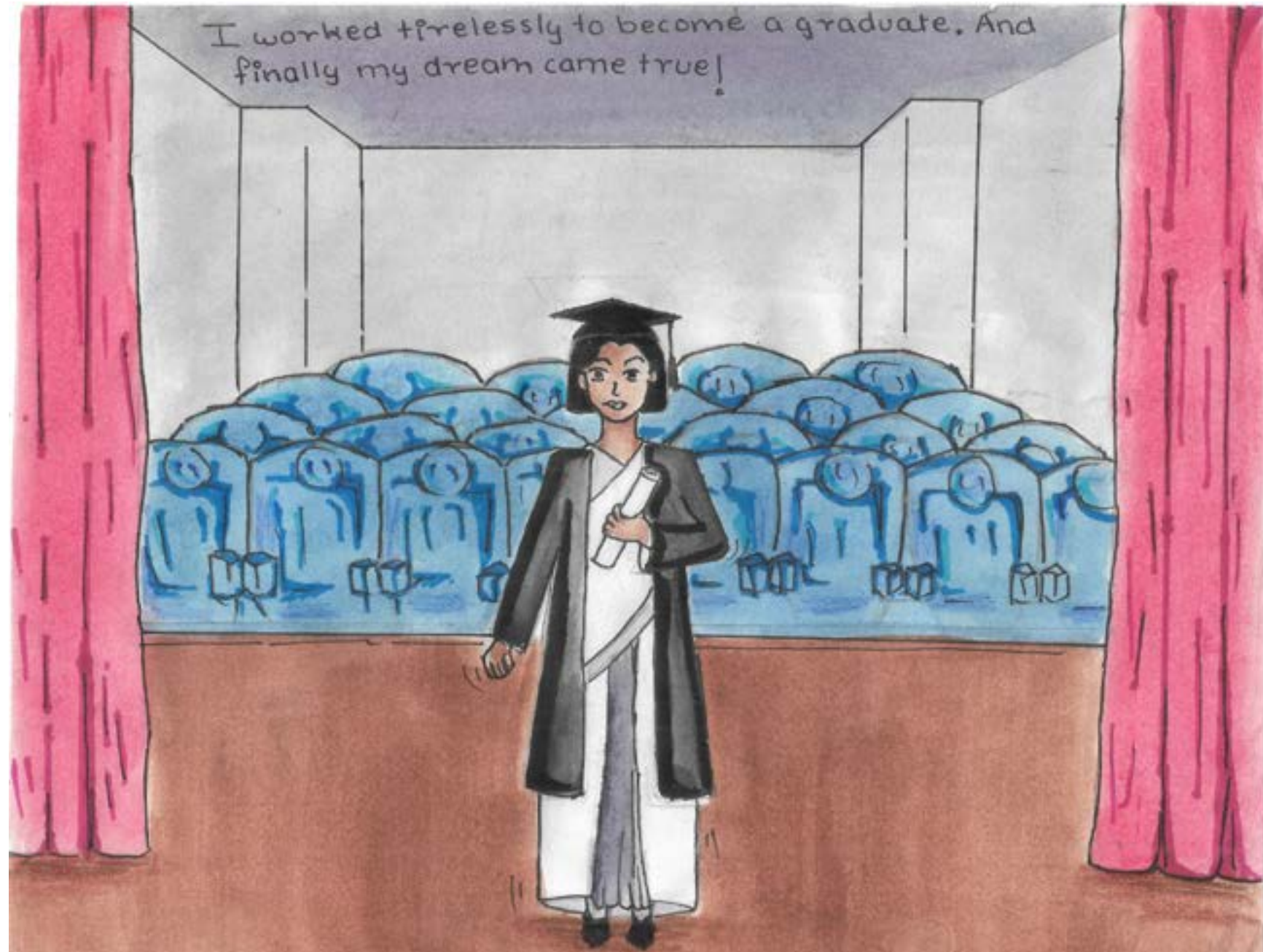
I was devastated. I had no hope left-
no place to live, no financial stability,
no support system, NOTHING. I
couldn't see a way out anymore. Every
breath felt heavy, pointless. I was
surviving on the streets.

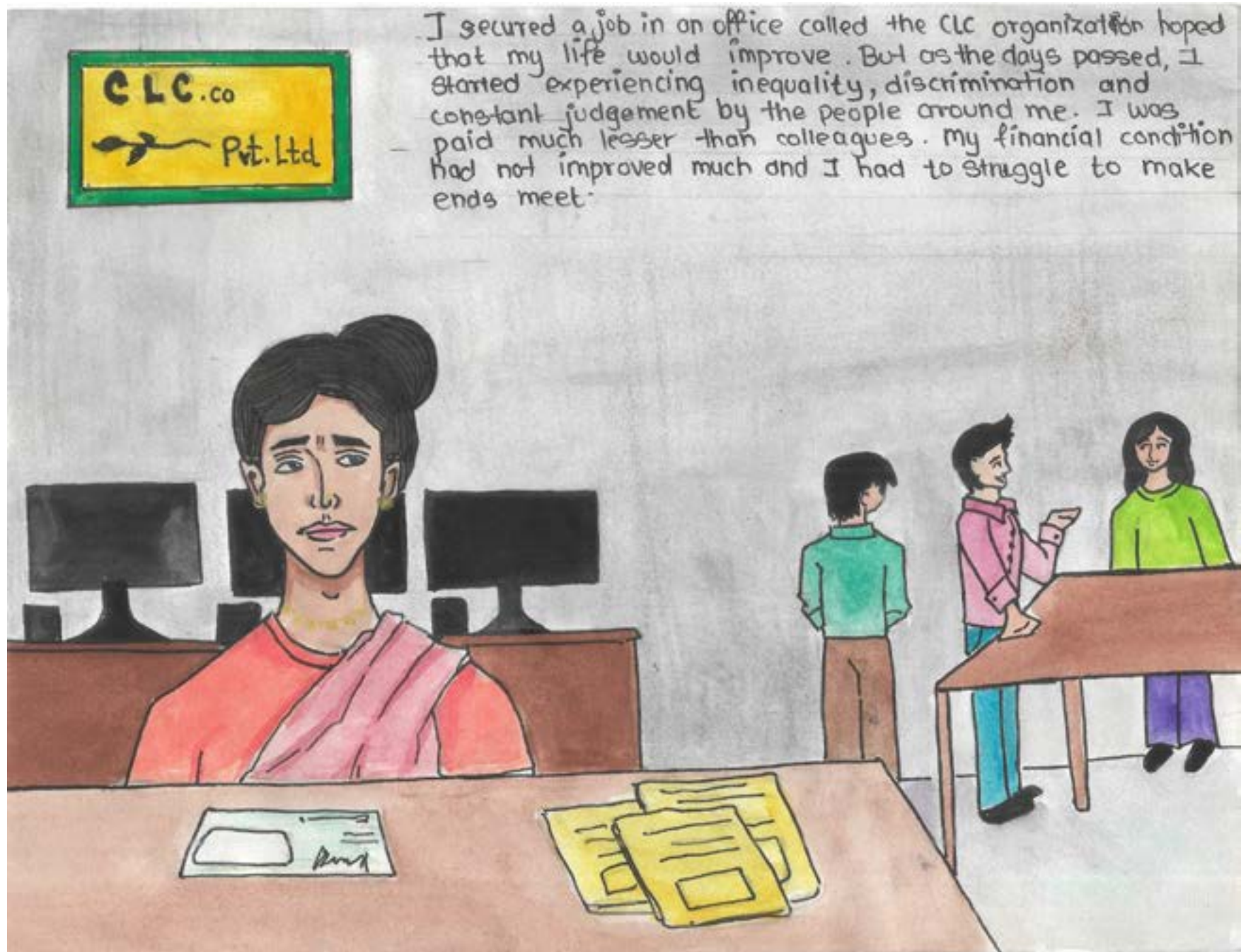


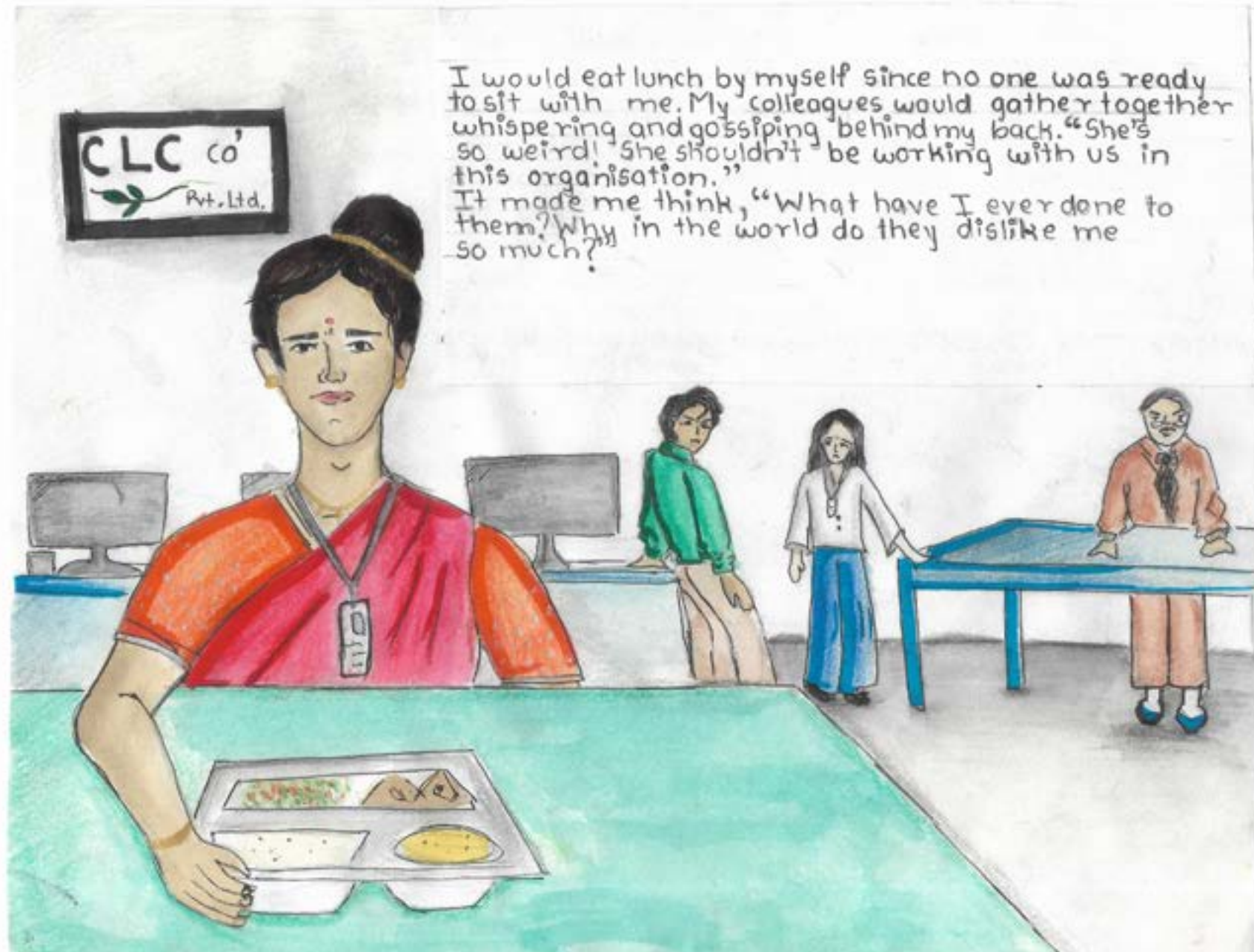
One night I sat under a street light whispering, "I'm lost! I have no idea what to do next!!" In that moment of despair, I thought of giving up my life. Just then, God sent me two Godmothers. One of them put her hand on my shoulder and said, "Don't you worry. We are there to help."











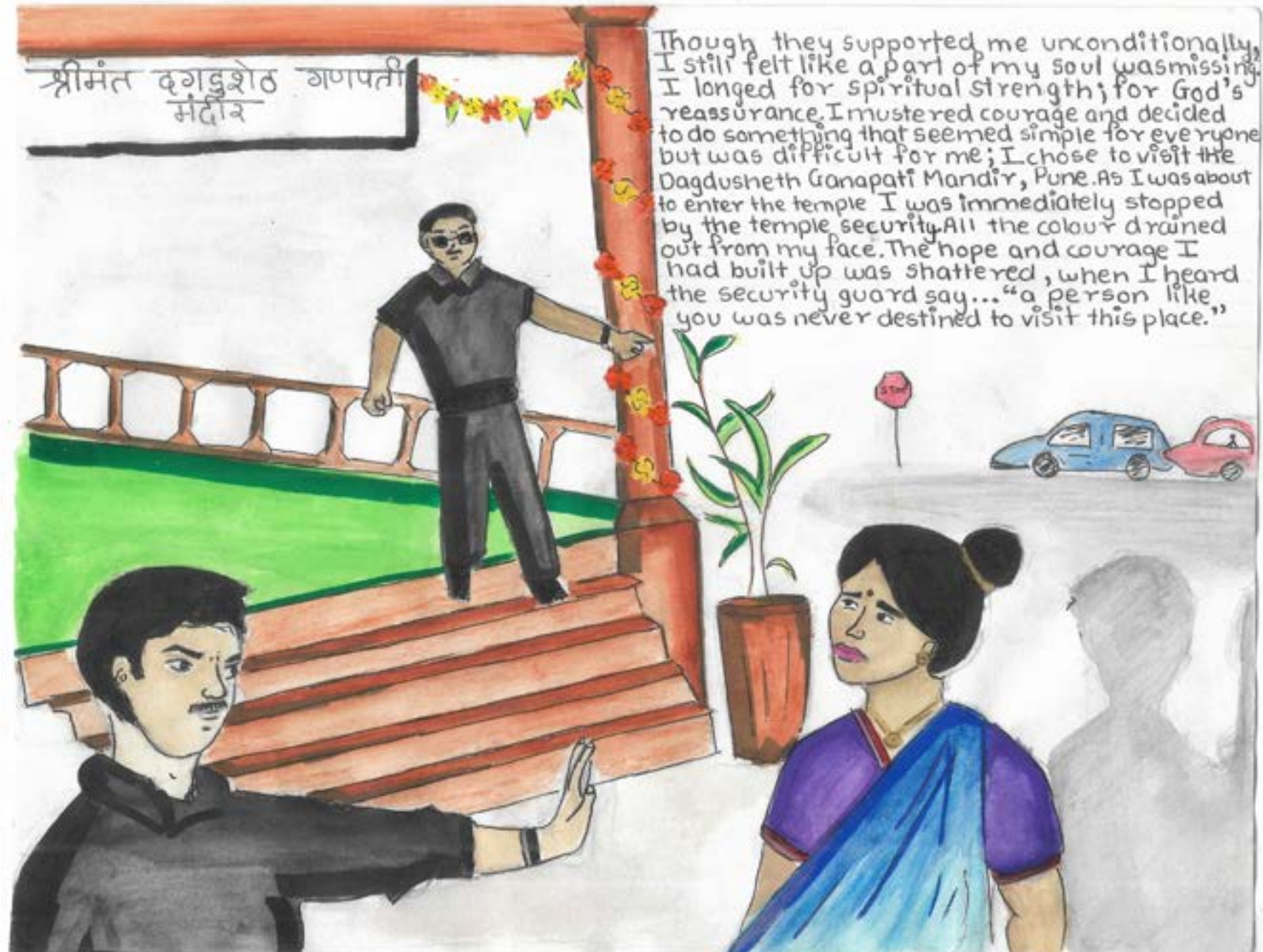


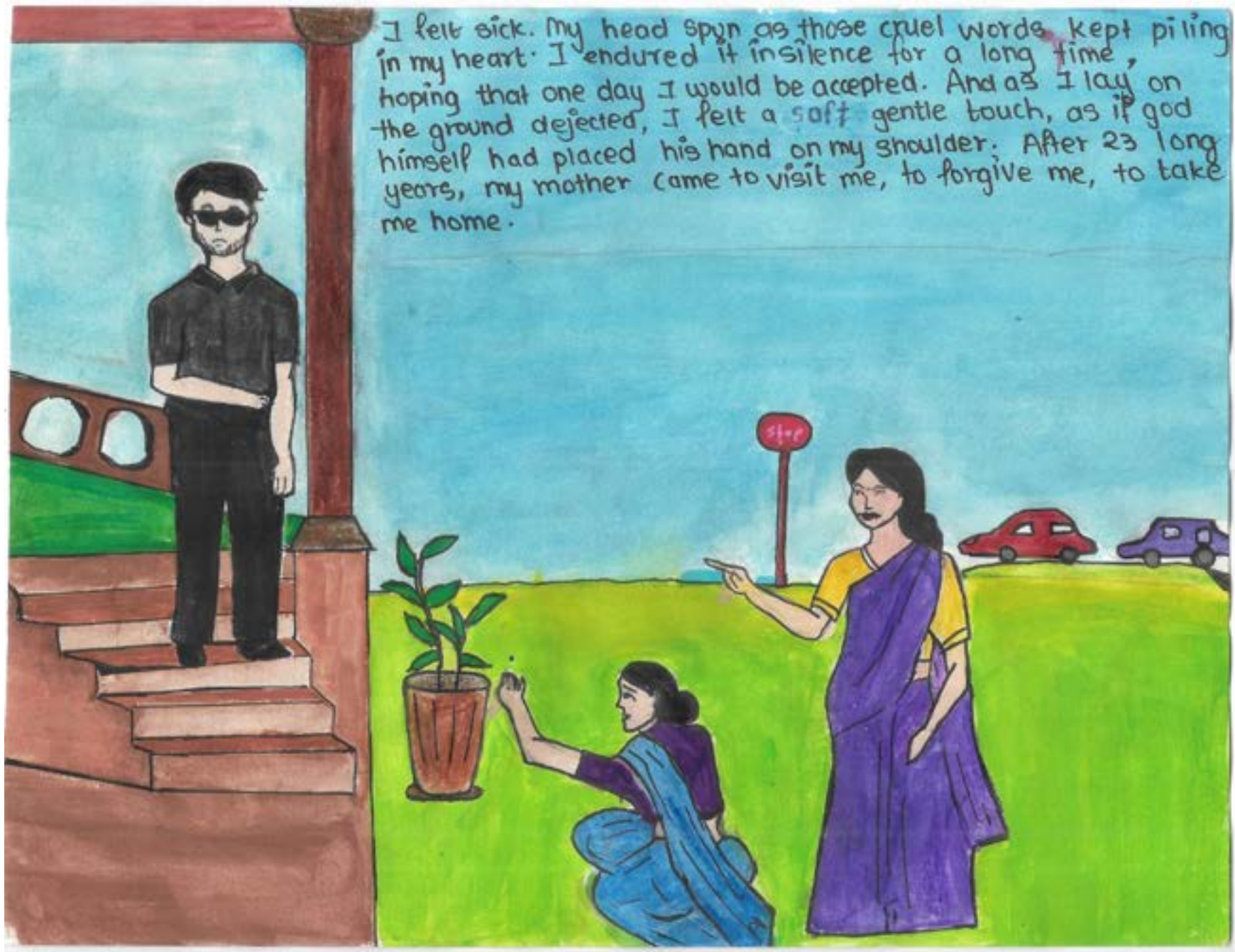
SASSOON
HOSPITAL

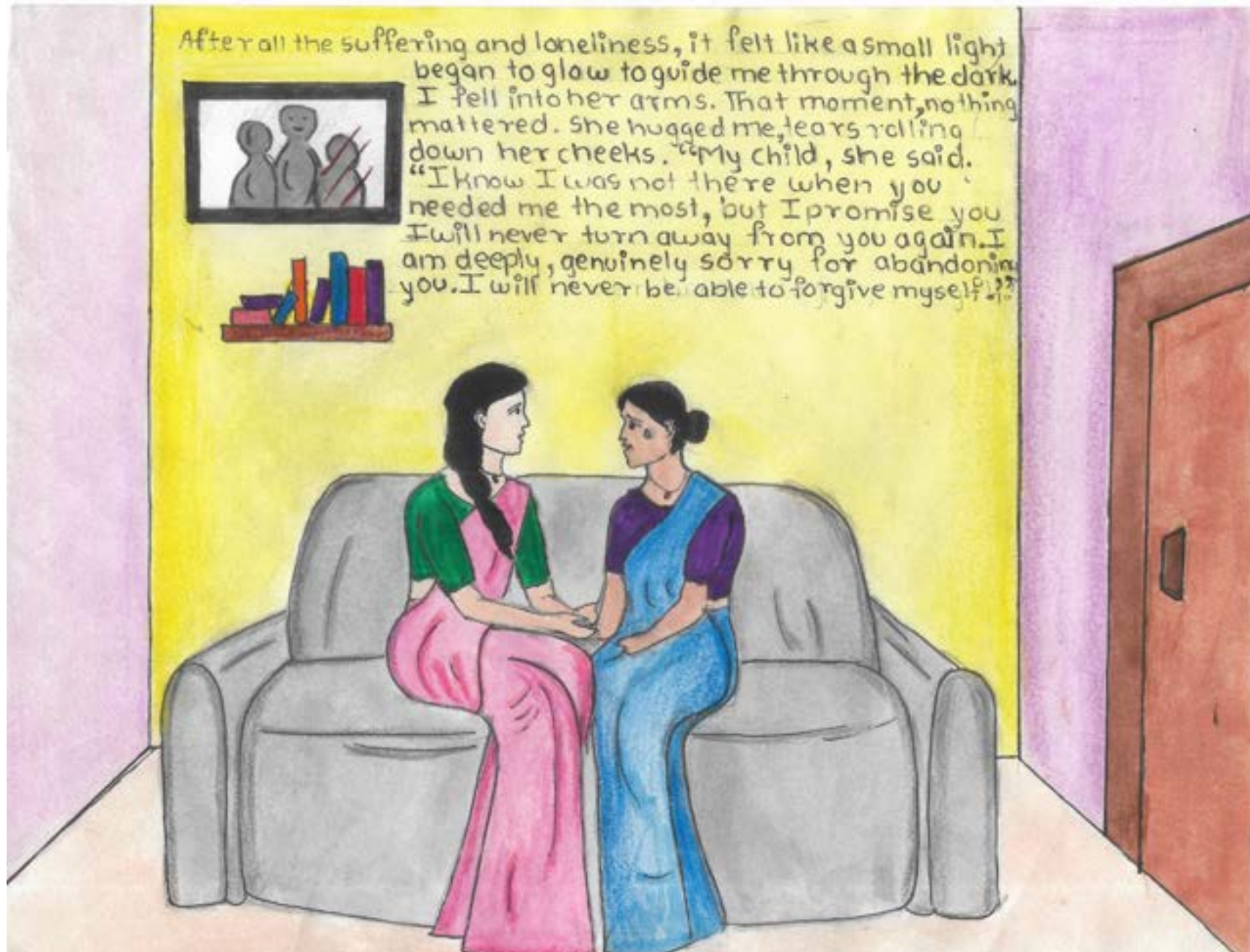


After a few days, I was suffering from high fever and bouts of vomiting and needed immediate medical care. I went to the Sassoon hospital for treatment. I was very sick, yet, I was refused admission on the grounds that there was no ward for transgenders and they could not place me with either the male or female ward. I felt helpless and hopeless. Each day felt like a struggle.





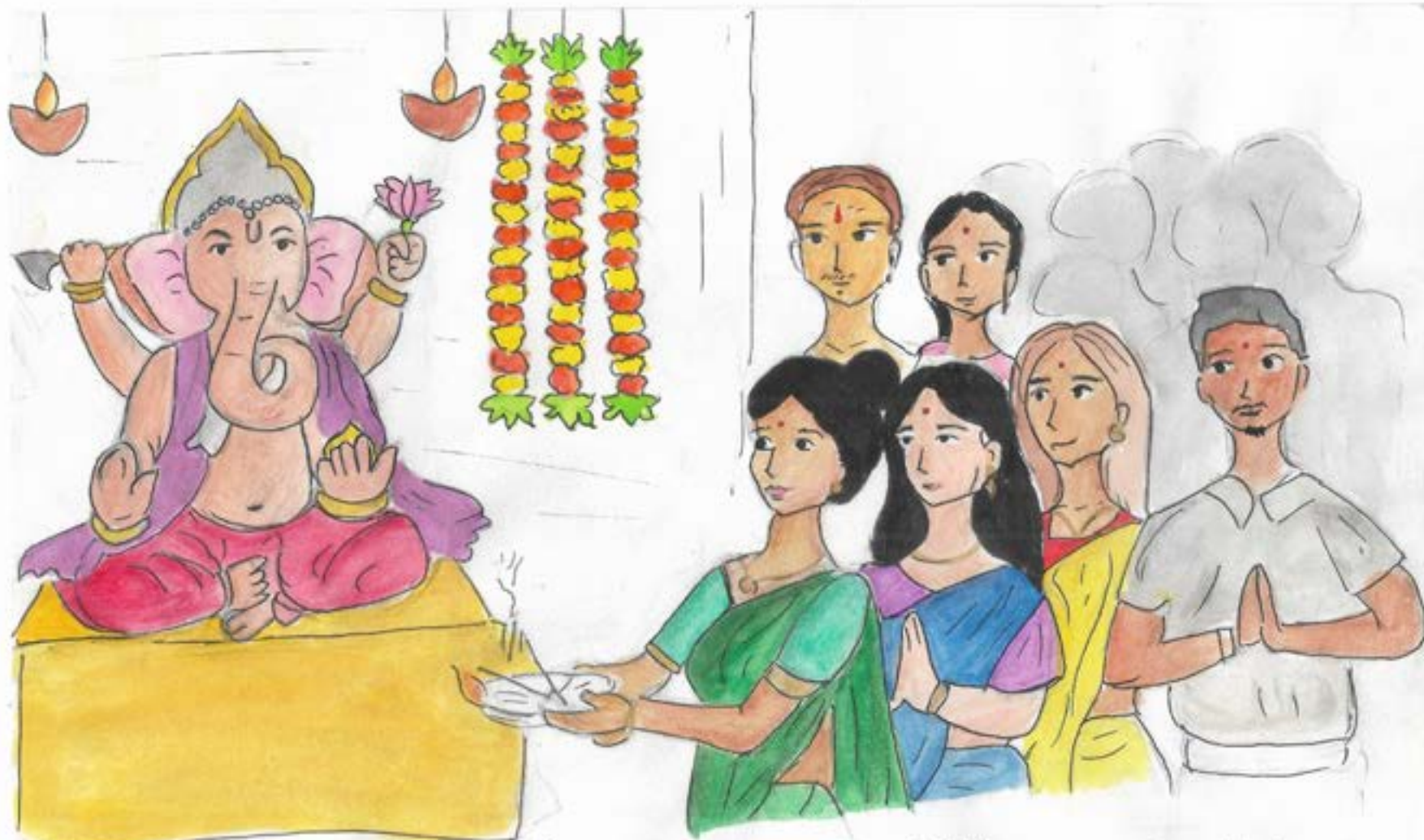




That single act of concern gave me the strength to face every challenge that came my way. I began writing letters to several public officials and ministers. It took time for them to respond, but I remained determined. I refused to back down. My resolve grew stronger with my mother's support.

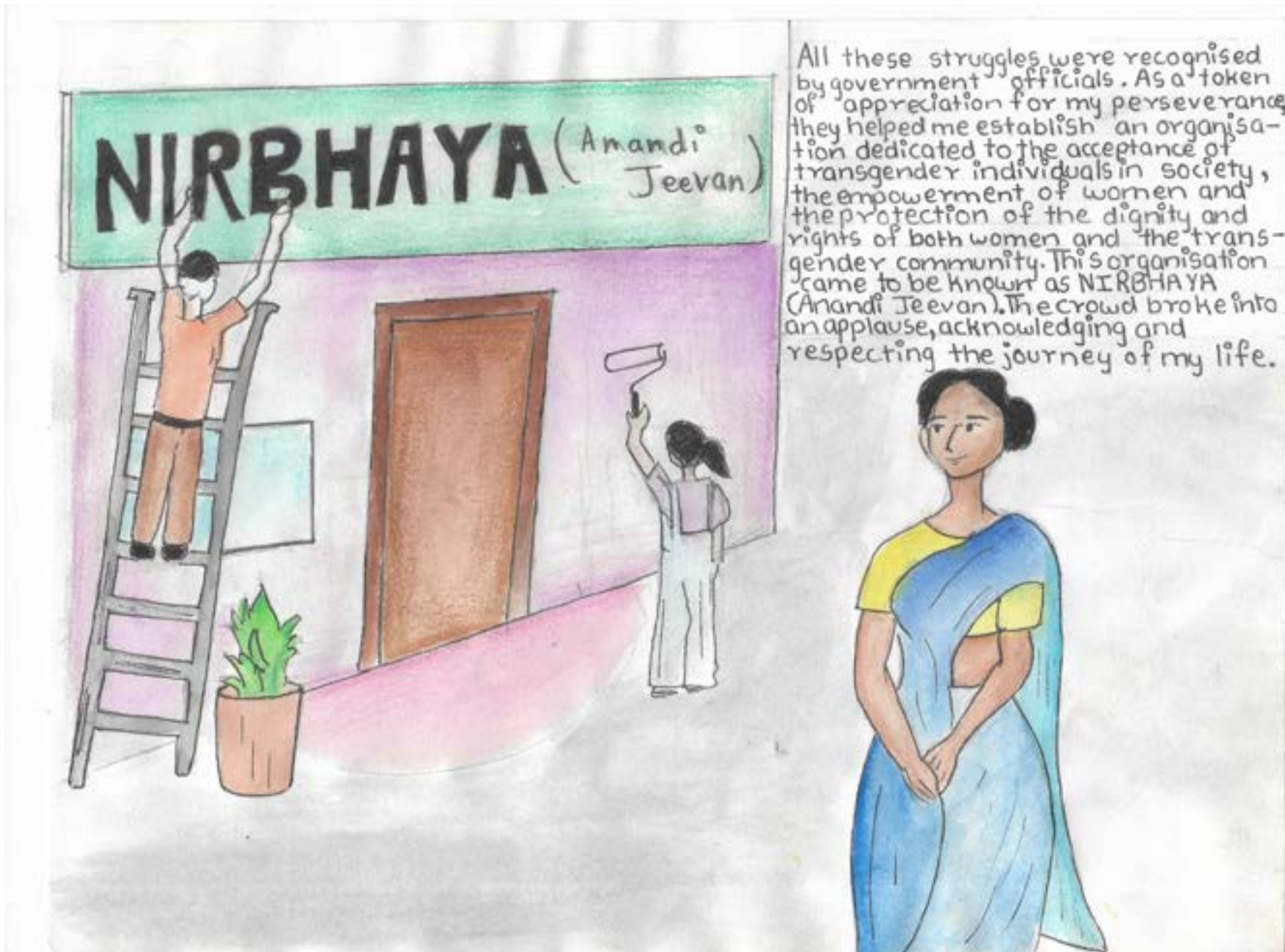






After fighting countless battles, I finally succeeded. The minister assured us that every year, during the Ganapati festival at Dagdusheth Ganapati Mandir, our community will be given the opportunity to perform the maha Ganapati aarti. It was the first step I had taken for the well-being of my community and I felt truly triumphant for the first time in my life. My mother was so proud of me!





I continued, "I believe, each human being, regardless of their race, caste, class or gender deserves the right to embrace their true self. Accept yourself and others just as they are. Let us spread love, kindness and respect wherever we go. Remember, the world will not care for you if you do not care for yourself."



Reflections

The CAL project helped me improve my English vocabulary and writing skills. It helped me analyze and improve my communication skills not only with others but also my team mates and be open minded to various ideas. It gave me the confidence of interviewing people. This story of a transgender has made me realise the pain and suffering this community goes through and that we really need to be empathetic and I would definitely like to contribute more to society.

Annavi Chitre

This project was very different from anything I have done before, but in a good way. Firstly, I learned a lot of new things through this activity, not just academically but also personally. Working on it made me feel happy and proud because it had a deeper meaning. It taught me the importance of teamwork, consistency and cooperation, which are very important in real life. In addition to this I have learnt to be more patient and understanding while working with out of the box ideas and perspectives. This project helped me become more confident in expressing thoughts creatively overall, it was a meaningful.

Anushka Gudmewar





Wings Against the Wind: My Fight for Education

Illustrators: Karishma Pawar and Sahil Chavan

Mentors: Ishika Bansod and Karan Yargolkar

Zameer Foundation

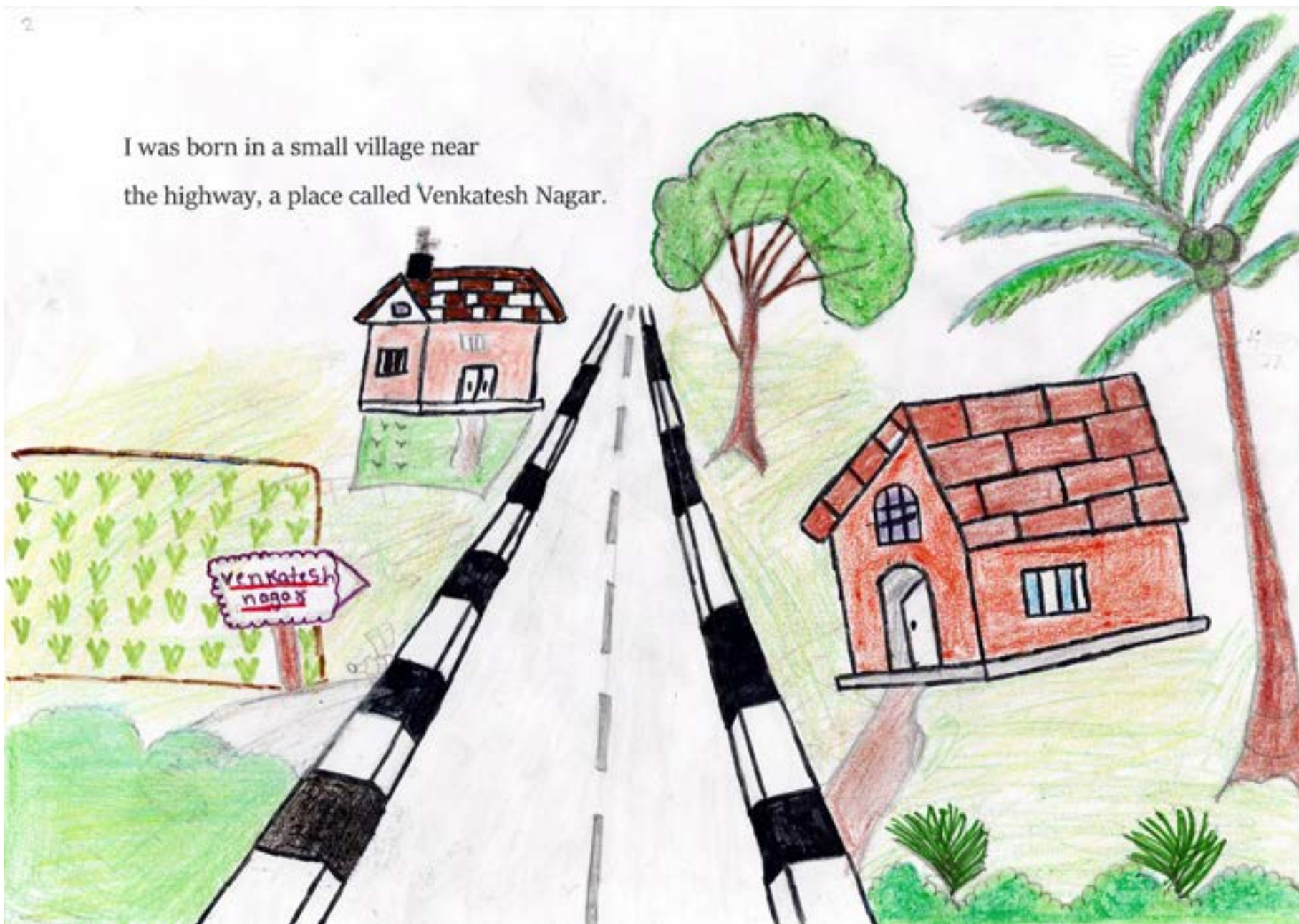
Wings Against the Wind

Zameer Foundation

Authors: Karishma Pawar and Sahil Chavan

Mentors: Ishika Bansod and Karan Yargolkar

I was born in a small village near
the highway, a place called Venkatesh Nagar.



3

Our community, the Banjara Lambani, is known for its hardworking spirit. Most families farm their small plots of land or live as nomads.

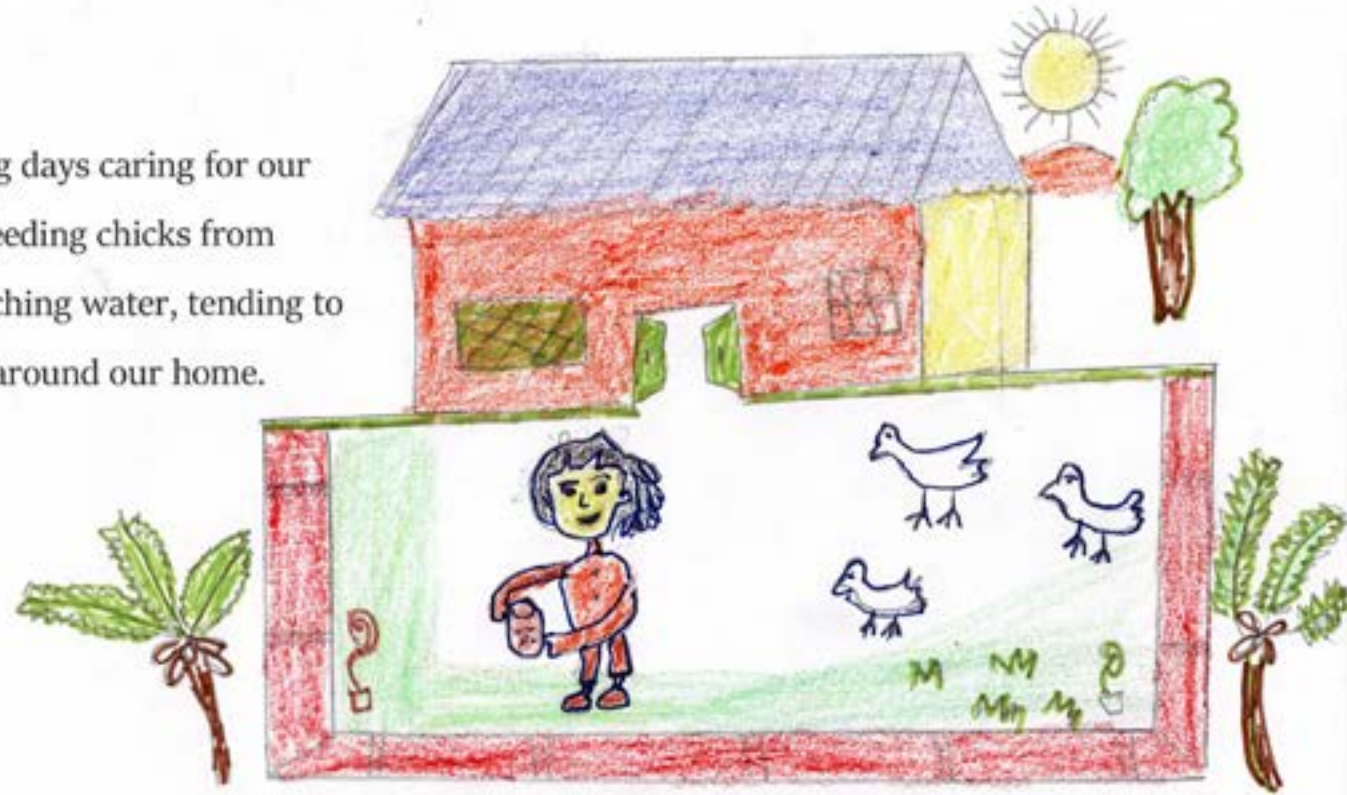


My home back then was simple, built
from tin sheets and stones, but it
carried the warmth of my family's effort.



5

My parents spent long days caring for our small poultry farm, feeding chicks from sunrise to sunset, fetching water, tending to the trees we planted around our home.



Life was modest, but it was steady,
filled with resilience and the earthy
rhythm of village living.

Until the age of eleven, my
childhood felt like a free bird
gliding across the sky.

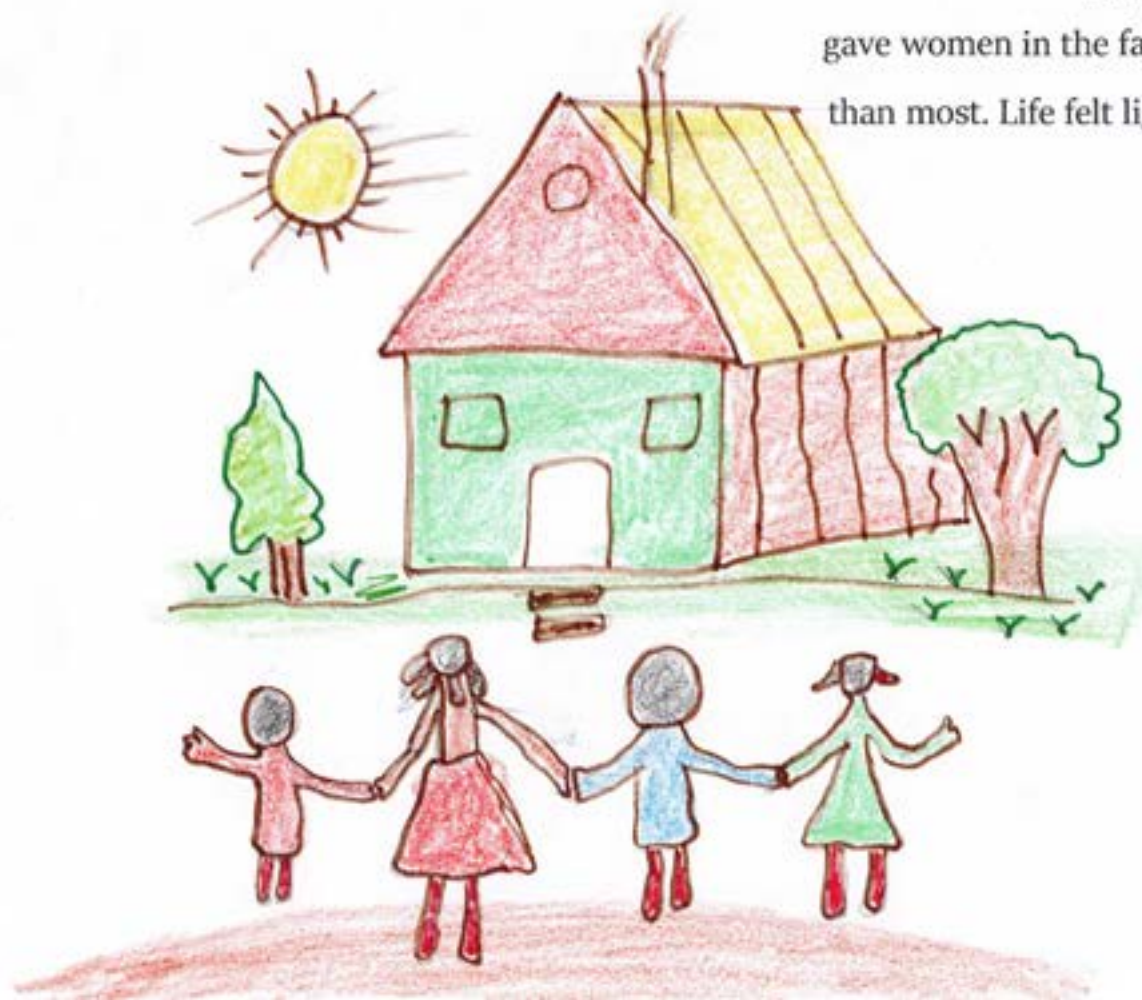


7

I played with my three siblings, laughed
loudly, and dreamed without fear.



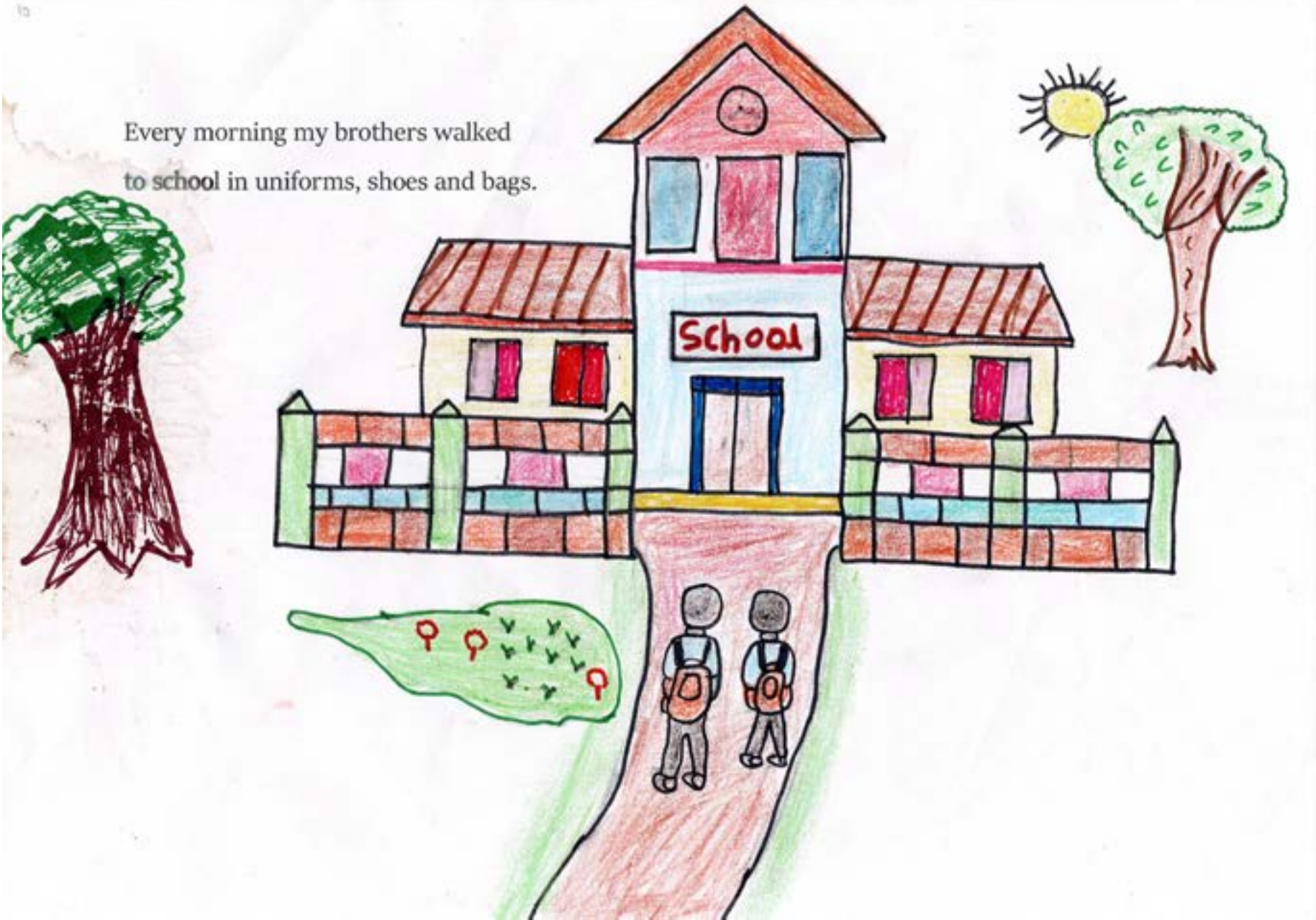
Father was easy-going, less strict, and gave women in the family more freedom than most. Life felt lighter in those days.



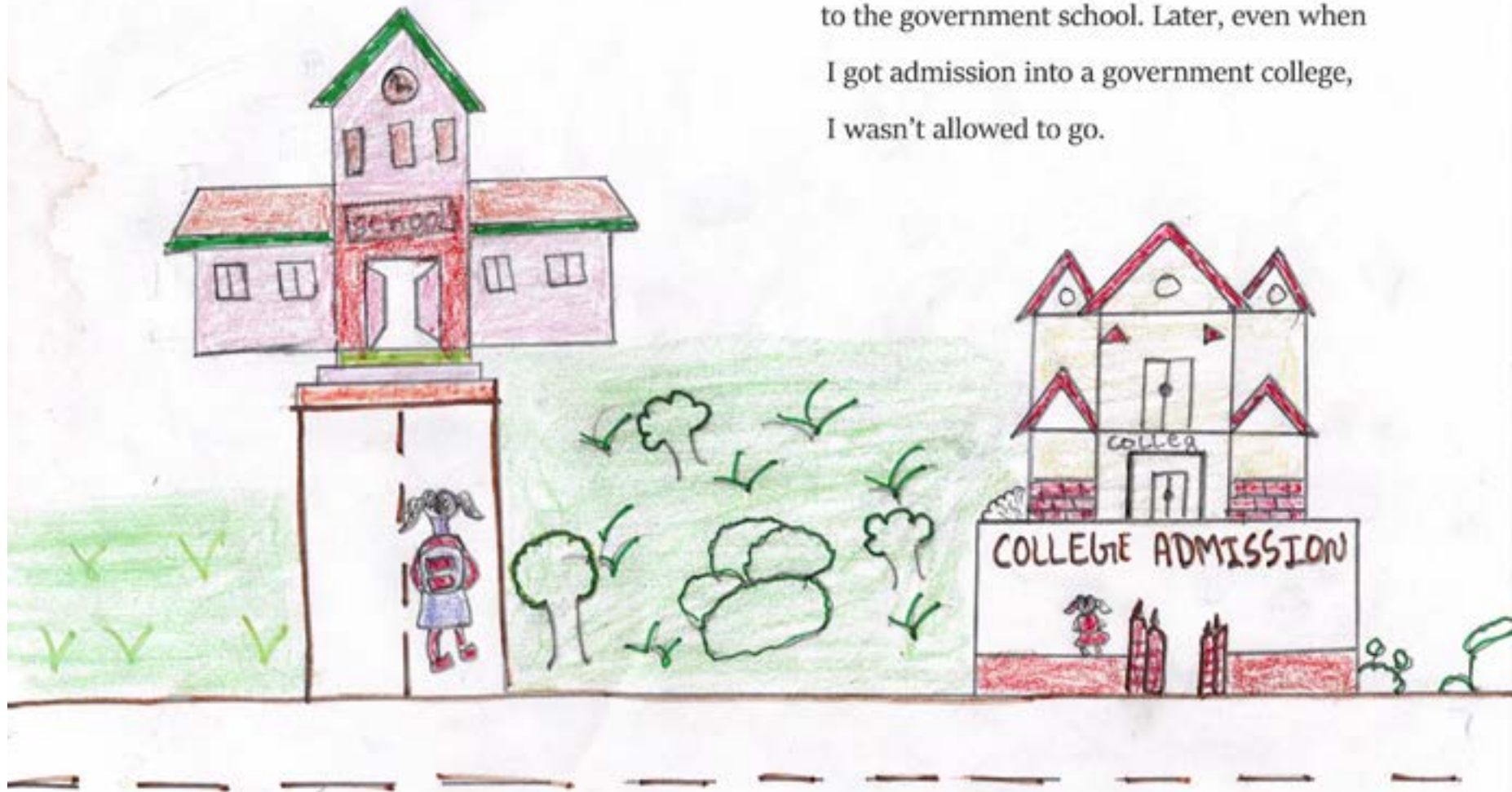
But slowly, like dark clouds drifting
across a sunny sky, I noticed changes.



Every morning my brothers walked to school in uniforms, shoes and bags.



I, the daughter of the same house, was sent to the government school. Later, even when I got admission into a government college, I wasn't allowed to go.



12

Instead, my days were spent in the poultry farm, feeding birds, giving tablets, sweeping floors, doing whatever needed to be done.



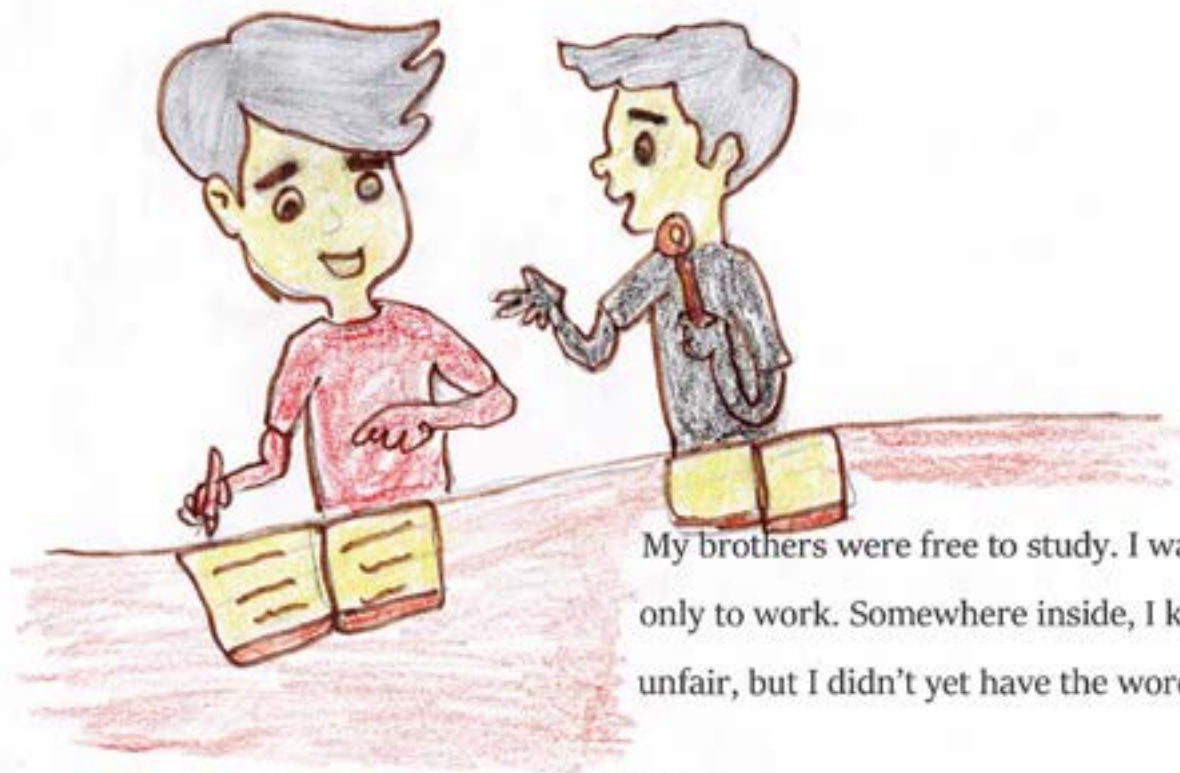
13

If I paused, my father scolded me.

If I said I was tired, his furious

face forced me back to work.

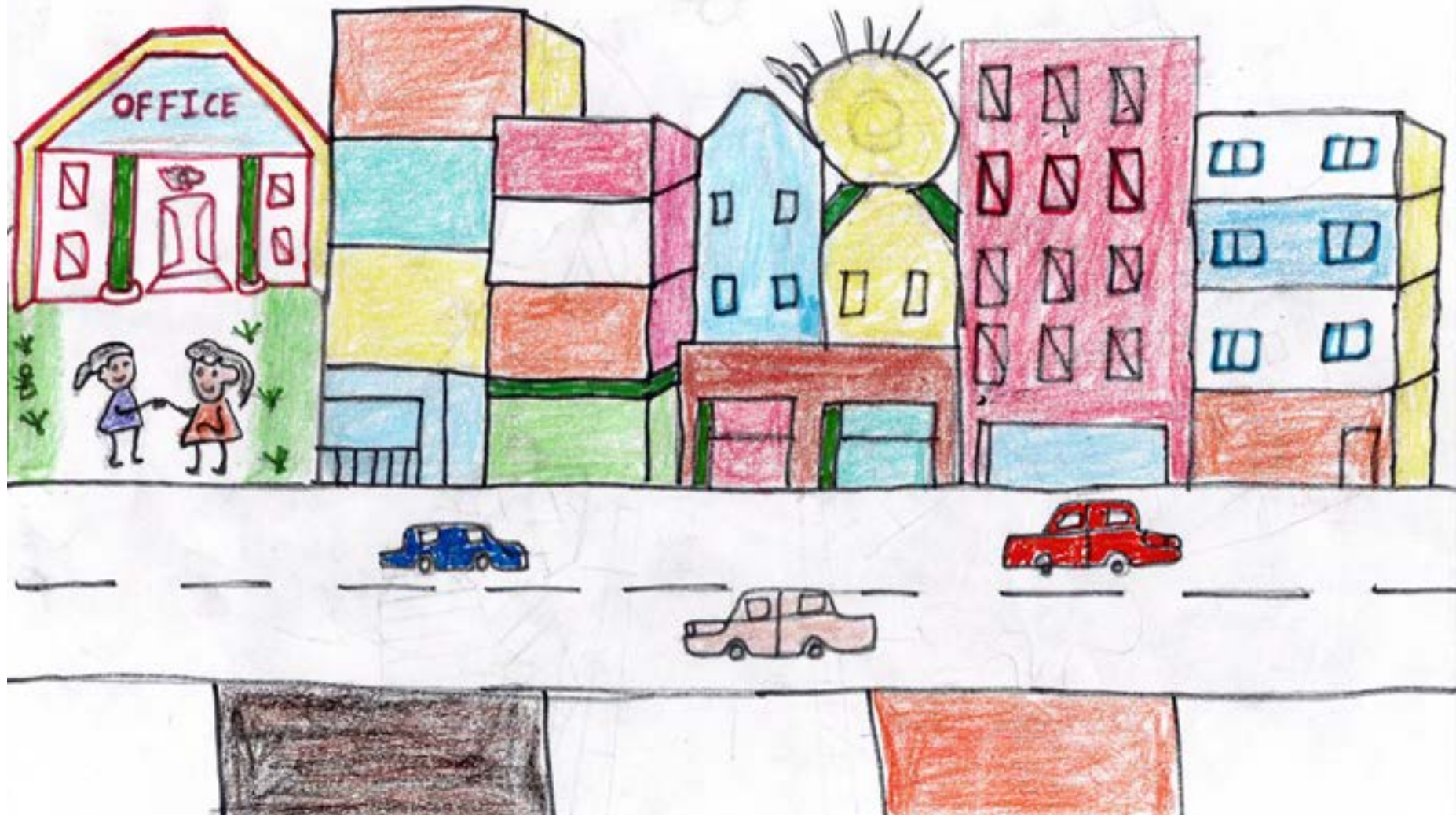




My brothers were free to study. I was expected only to work. Somewhere inside, I knew it was unfair, but I didn't yet have the words to say it.

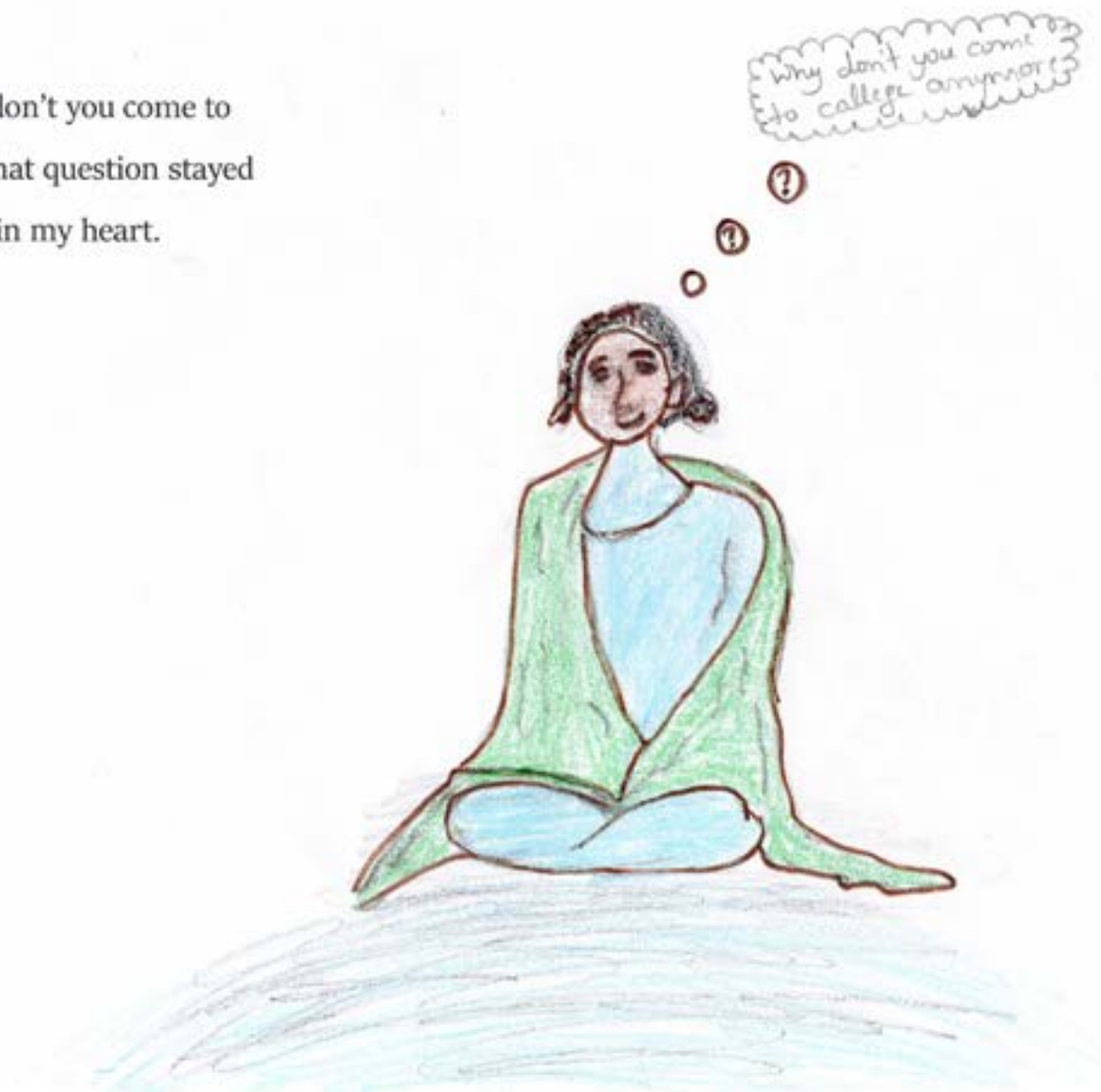
15

One day, while traveling to Yadgir for a document, I met an old classmate.



16

He asked me, "Why don't you come to college anymore?" That question stayed with me like a stone in my heart.



17

When I returned home, I saw my brothers laughing, reading, and discussing lessons with their friends. Their happiness should have made me smile, but instead it broke something inside me. It wasn't just sadness, it was the realization that I was being left behind, not because I lacked dreams, but because I was a girl.



16

When I finally gathered courage and asked my father to send me to college again, he replied harshly, "If you go, who will do the poultry work?"



His words echoed through the night. I lay awake, crying, thinking: **Why is education only for boys? Why is my dream less important? Was my future only feathers, feed, and farm work?** These questions kept circling in my mind.



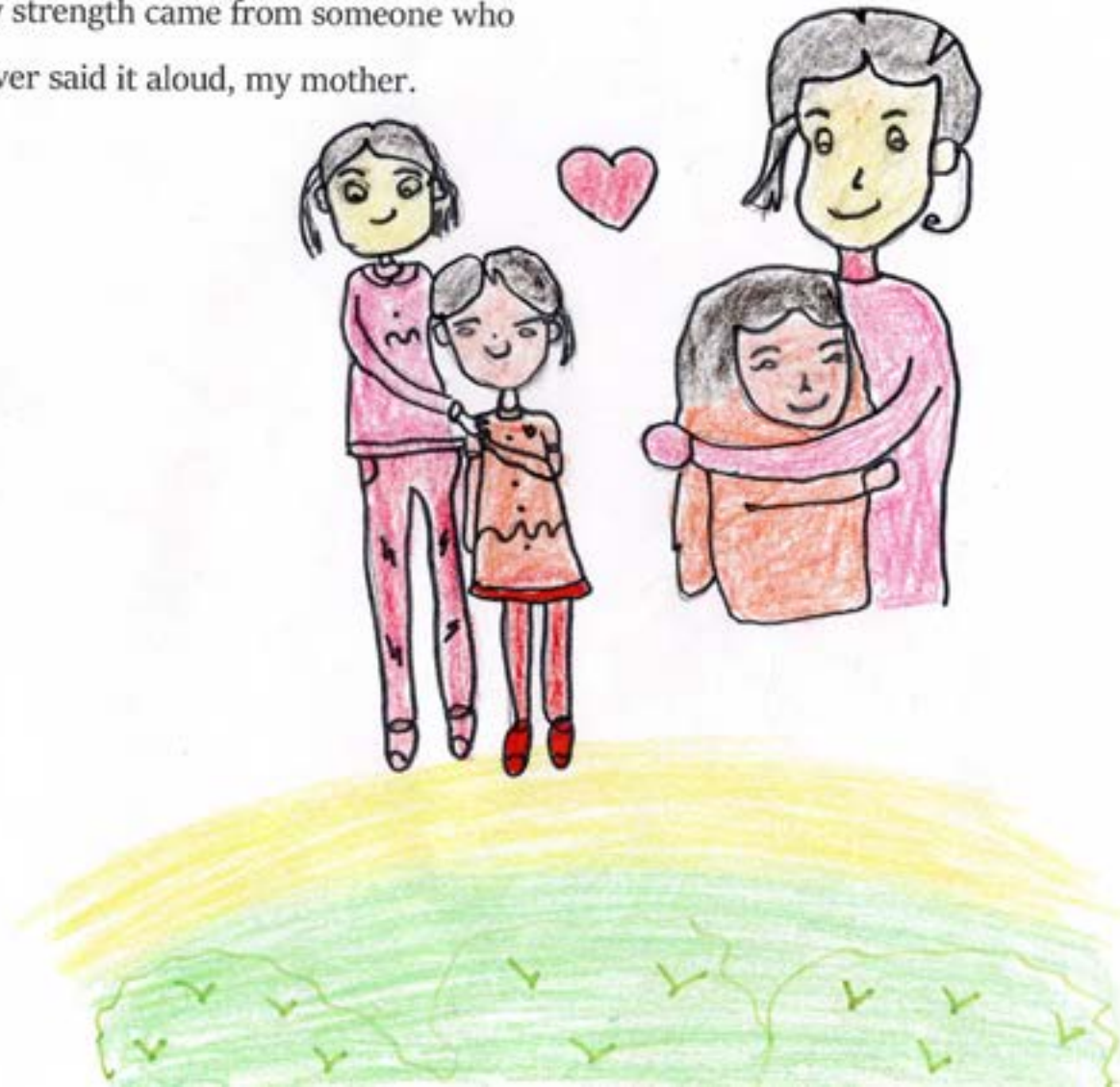
20

I faced punishment too. My father scolded me, sometimes hit me, and often loaded me with endless work.



21

My strength came from someone who
never said it aloud, my mother.



All day she worked in the poultry farm,
then came home to cook, clean, and manage
the house.



Even when exhaustion wrapped
around her like a heavy blanket, she kept moving.



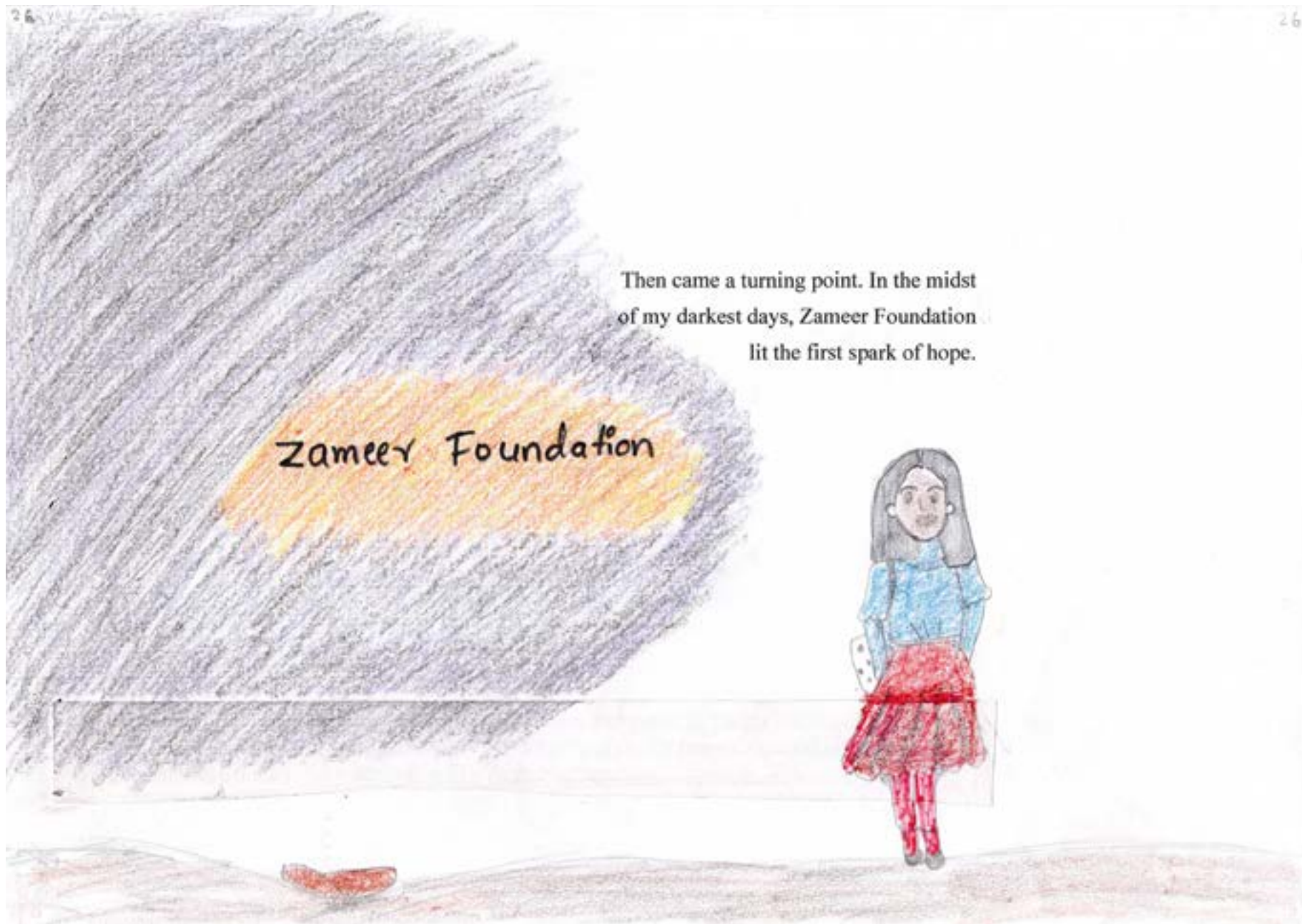
She scolded me sometimes, but her strength taught me something: **Women may be tired, but they never stop fighting.**



25

I wanted to make her proud. I wanted to show that girls too can rise, dream, and achieve. Equality, I realized, is not just a word, it is the bridge that gives every child, boy or girl, the right to dream.





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Founded in 2022, the organization works for children and youth in Yadgir district of Karnataka, cultivating courage, empathy, and integrity. Prabhu Bhaiya, the founder, helped me fight back. They supported me to take admission in a degree college.



25

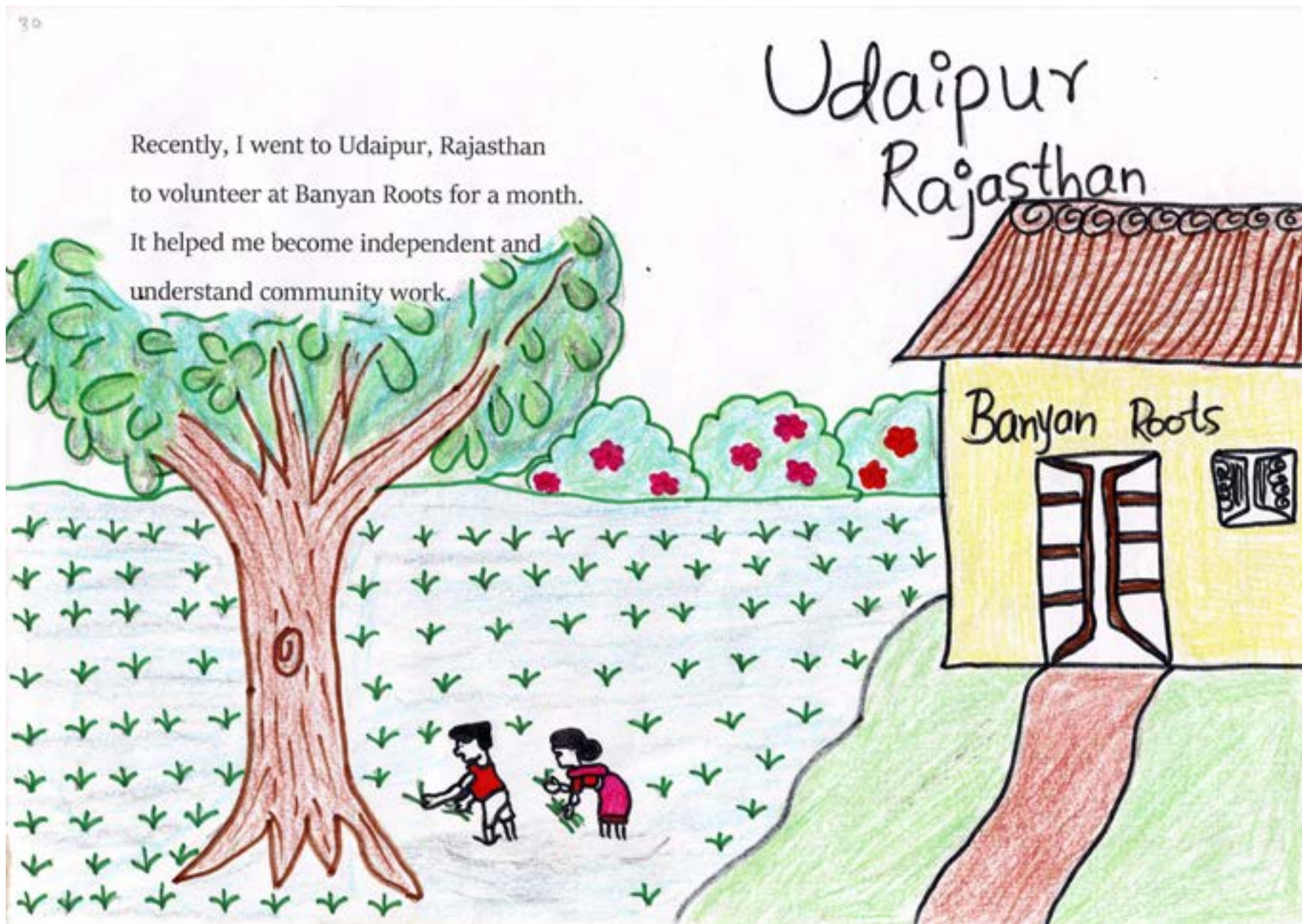
In my first semester, I felt like
giving up because of family pressure.
But they stood by me, not only financially,
but emotionally too, even helping resolve family problems.



24

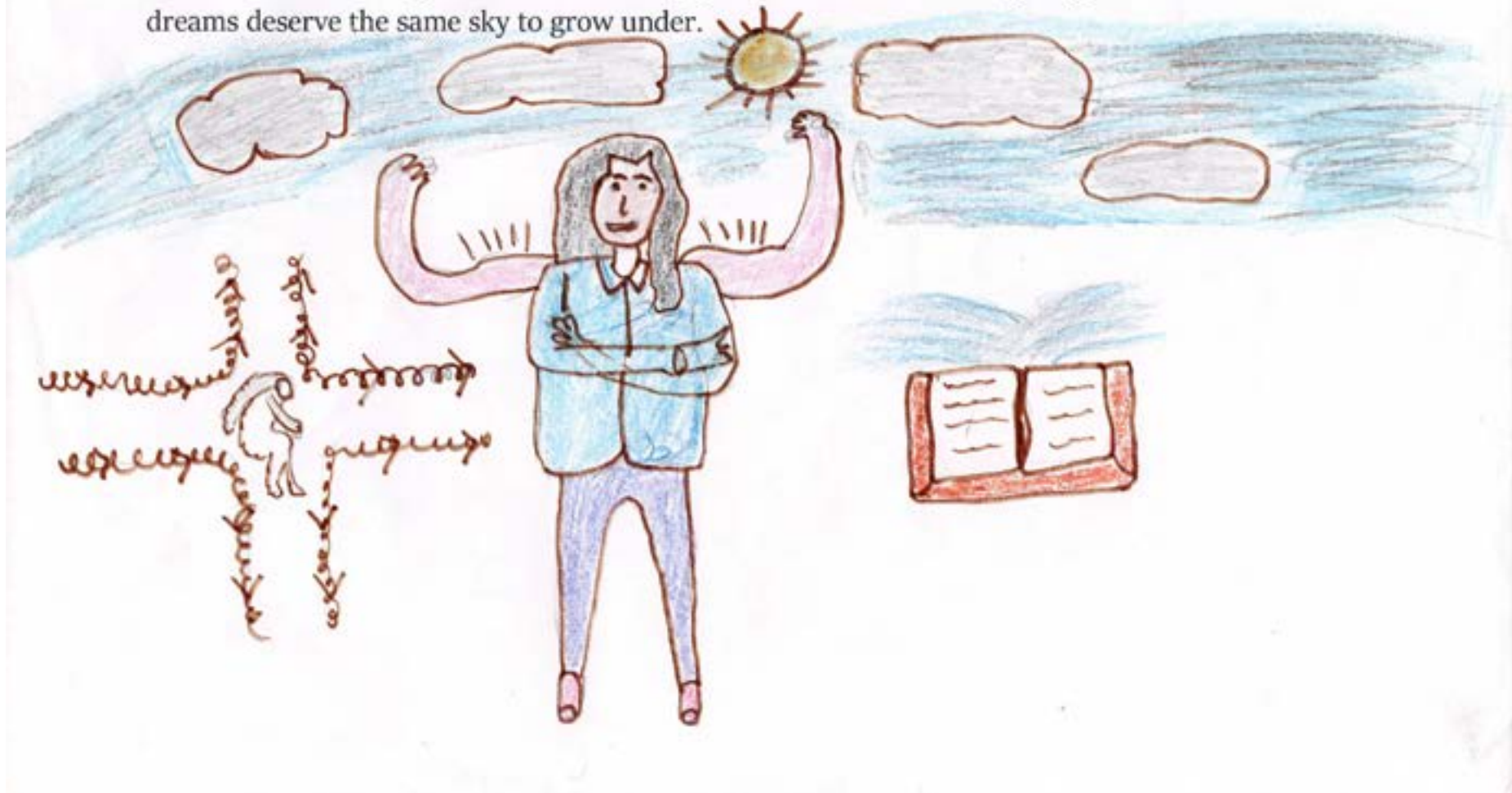


Their presence gave me opportunities to explore and grow. Zameer Foundation is not just support, it is family.



31

Today, when I look back, I know my struggle was never only mine. It belongs to every girl who was told, "You can't." My story is not about competing with boys or proving I can do what they do. It is about showing the world that every girl has a dream worth fighting for and that her dreams deserve the same sky to grow under.



Reflections

We chose this story because it shows how discrimination happens in small places such as poultry farms, homes, and schools. It is part of her everyday life. Even though she faces many problems, she does not stop studying. She works hard to achieve her goals. Many people try to stop girls from doing what they want, and girls who do not speak up are quietly affected by this discrimination. People observe others and, in some cases, discriminate against their own daughters as well.

While working on this story, we learned that discrimination does not only happen in

big situations; it also exists in small places and everyday work. By talking to people, we understood my community better. They shared their experiences, interests, and what really happens in their daily lives. This helped us understand the issue more deeply and learn how to raise awareness, convince people, create a storybook, make illustrations, and gain the confidence to share personal life stories.

Karishma Pawar and Sahil Chavan





The Weight She Knows

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We are also grateful to our families, whose perspectives and encouragement enriched our reflections on fairness and shared responsibility within the home.

This book is inspired by the lived experiences of countless children who quietly bear the weight of unequal expectations. Their resilience serves as the heart of this story, and we acknowledge them with deep respect.

Finally, we thank our readers for engaging with this work.

We hope it encourages reflection and contributes to a more balanced and equitable understanding of responsibility in everyday life.

1

PURPOSE

This story shows how responsibilities inside a home should not depend on whether someone is a boy or a girl. It highlights how many girls grow up doing a lot of work without being noticed, while boys are not taught the same skills. Through Ajab and Burhanuddin, the story teaches that fairness begins at home, and when boys and girls share the workload, both get more time, respect, and freedom.

The purpose is to encourage equality, empathy, and understanding among children, and to show that helping at home is not “girls’ work” — it is everyone’s work. When responsibilities are shared, families become stronger, happier, and more loving.

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4

The morning sun slipped through the cracked window of a modest home in Zahoor Nagar, painting soft gold on the floor where eleven-year-old Ajab swept in slow, practiced strokes.

Her movements were quiet, almost invisible, as if she had learned long ago to take up little space while doing much work.

Outside, the lane echoed with cricket balls slamming into tin sheets and boys shouting with fierce joy. Among them was Burhanuddin, her older brother, racing barefoot with a kind of freedom Ajab had never tasted.

This was routine. Predictable. Expected.
But the day had not yet revealed that things would soon shift—quietly, but forever.

5

Inside, their mother prepared tea, her dupatta tucked firmly at her waist.

She called out, "Ajab, beta, help me with the cups."

And Ajab came instantly—because she always did.



6

Burhanuddin darted in just then, snatching a biscuit from the tin.
"Ammi, I'm going!" he said, already halfway out.
No one stopped him.

Their father, reading the newspaper, smiled.
"He's a boy. Let him enjoy."

Ajab heard it. She always heard it.

The message was stitched into the walls of their home.
And though she did not fully understand why she felt a sting
in her chest, she carried on sweeping, her small wrists moving
like tired metronomes marking a rhythm she never chose.

7

Later that day, while scrubbing steel
bowls until her fingers pruned,
Ajab watched
Burhanuddin outside through the
window grille.

He had never noticed. Not truly. Not
the repetition, not the responsibility,
not against them. Her arms ached.
A thin line of fatigue sat under her eyes.
eyes.

When Burhanuddin barged in, hair
wild, he shouted. "Ajab! Come!
We're starting a new match!"
But Ajab didn't move. For the first
time, she didn't force a smile.
"I can't, bhai." Her voice trembled.
"I'm tired. I do everything alone."

8

Her words were not loud, but they cut through the air as sharply as truth always does Burhanuddin froze.

He had never noticed. Not truly. Not the repetition, not the responsibility, not the quiet exhaustion she hid behind obedience.



He looked around: the dirty dishes, the half-cut vegetables, the broom leaning against the wall.

Suddenly the room felt heavy, filled with things he had never bothered to see.

Ajab continued scrubbing, silently wiping droplets of water mixed with tears.

Something inside him cracked open—a small but undeniable realization he felt pity for her sister and a sense of concern start to evoke within him.

Without thinking, he put down his
cricket bat.

Then, rolling up his sleeves, he said
awkwardly, "Move... let me do some."

Ajab stared, confused.

But when he dipped his hands into
soapy water, splashing half of it onto
himself and the floor, she laughed—
the first genuine laugh that
touched her eyes that day.

The bowls slipped, soap bubbles flew,
and he was terrible at it.

But he didn't stop.

Together, they finished the sink. Slowly.
Clumsily. But together.

But real change is never a single
moment. It is a seed that needs
watering.

The next morning, everyone woke
to a strange sound—scrape, scrape,



They found Burhanuddin in the
living room, broom in hand,
eyebrows furrowed in
determination.

"Bhai?" Ajab whispered.
"I'm trying." he muttered, a
cloud of dust forming around him.

Ajab giggled.
Ammi blinked in disbelief.
Abba hid a smile
behind his newspaper.
The broom wobbled, Dust
swirled.
But Burhanuddin did
not give up.

13

Over the next week, he learned
things he had never been
expected to learn.

How to rinse rice without spilling
half of it.

How to knead dough without it
sticking to his elbows.

How to sweep in straight lines.

How to fold clothes so they didn't
look like abandoned paper boats.

Ajab guided him with patience she
didn't know she possessed.

In helping her, he discovered
something unexpected—helping
felt good. Not weak. Not
embarrassing.

14



Their parents, who had never imagined such a shift, watched with curiosity.

They were both surprised on seeing this sudden change in burhanuddin's behaviour



At dinner one night, when Burhanuddin set the steel plates neatly in front of everyone, Abba looked at him with raised eyebrows.

“Yeh sab... kab seekha?” Burhanuddin shrugged, but Ajab answered, “We learned together.”

Abba nodded slowly, thoughtful. In that simple moment, a tiny transformation occurred in the household—one where expectations were no longer carved into gender, but into shared humanity.

At school, however, the story
unfolded differently.

When Burhanuddin mentioned
sweeping, his friends burst
out laughing.

“You?” they jeered. “Doing girls’
work?”

Something inside him tightened—
but then he remembered Ajab’s
tired eyes that day.

He stood firm.

“It’s not girls’ work. It’s house
work. And I live in my house too.”

The teasing stopped.

One boy went home that evening
helped his mother cut vegetables
for the first time.

17

As Ajab gained time, she
rediscovered the things she once
loved.

She painted again—vibrant
strokes of blue and maroon
dancing on paper.

She played badminton with her friends,
breathless and laughing.

She studied without falling asleep
mid-chapter.

Her world expanded.

And Burhanuddin realized
something profound:

And guilt.

18



That evening, something unusual happened.

Ajab's mother returned from visiting a neighbor, her dupatta still damp from the sudden drizzle outside. As she entered, she found Ajab wiping the dining table while Burhanuddin lay sprawled upside-down on the sofa, watching a YouTube reel on full volume.

"Burhanuddin!" she called sharply,
"At least sit properly!"

He flipped over lazily.

"Why, Mummy? I'm watching something."

His mother opened her mouth
to scold him...
then stopped.

"Ajab, beta... have you been working since you came from school?"

Ajab hesitated, then nodded.

For the first time, her mother didn't turn to her and say, "Good girl."

Instead, she turned to her son.
"Burhan, go help your sister."

The remote slipped from his hand.

"What? Why me?"

"Because you live in this house too,"
replied defensively.

The sentence hit her harder than any scolding ever had.

He had never done it before.

Because no one had ever taught him.

"What do I do?" he muttered.
Ajab blinked.
No boy had ever asked her this.
"Here," she said gently, handing him
a cloth, "just wipe the chairs."
He did it terribly.
He missed corners, wiped dust, and
somehow managed to drop the
cloth twice.
Ajab couldn't help it – she laughed.
"You're doing it wrong."
Something Uncomfortable Begins
Burhanuddin stood awkwardly
beside
"Well, I've never done it before," he
replied defensively.
The sentence hit her harder than any
scolding ever had.
He had never done it before.
Because no one had ever taught
him.
Because nobody expected him at it.

21

Over the next few days, something changed—
and not smoothly.

"Burhan, set the table."
"Burhan, help fold clothes."
"Burhan, wash your own tiffin."

At first, he protested every time.

"This is boring!"
"I don't know how!"
"Why can't Ajab do it?"
He argued.

Once, he even burst into tears.

But every time, his mother repeated the same
calm line.

"Because you live here too."

22

Ajab watched these battles quietly, her heart tugging between guilt and relief. She didn't want him to suffer. But she didn't want to go back to the old days either.

Burhanuddin wasn't a bad boy.
He was simply untrained.
Like most boys.



23

Slowly — painfully slowly — he began to learn.

He learned how to fold a shirt so it didn't look like a crumpled handkerchief.

He learned how to sweep without sending all the dust into one unlucky corner.

He learned how to wash a plate without leaving an oily patch the size of Pakistan.

And as he learned, something else happened.

He stopped treating the house like a hotel.
He began noticing the things Ajab had been noticing all her life.

The overflowing dustbin.

The scattered slippers.

The undone bed.

The tiny bits of pencil shavings under the study table.

For this first time their home looked like a responsibility to him, not magic

that happened behind his back.

24

One night, while filling school bottles for the next day, Burhanuddin spoke quietly.

"Ajab... does it feel bad? Doing all this every day?"

Ajab paused.

She wanted to say: Yes. It feels unfair.

She wanted to say: I'm tired.

She wanted to say: I wish someone had helped me earlier.

But instead she said something softer.

"It feels lonely."

Burhan's chest tightened.

"But... you never said anything."

"Who would listen?" she whispered.

"I will," he said immediately, surprising even himself.

At that moment, Ajab realized something:

Her brother had always had a heart — only the world had forgotten to grow it in the right direction.

25

What happened in that small house isn't unique.

Across India — across the world — girls like Ajab learn responsibility before they learn multiplication.

Boys like Burhan learn freedom before they learn empathy.

It's not anyone's fault.

It's everyone's inheritance.

At that moment, Ajab realized something:

Her brother had always had a heart — Burhanuddin.

"I'll do it," he said.

"You sit."

26



And if nothing changes, tomorrow's
women will be exhausted wives.
Tomorrow's men will be confused
husbands.
Both wondering why they cannot meet
each other halfway.



27

The true turning point came on a
Wednesday afternoon.
Their mother fell sick.
Not dangerously – just a bad fever that
made her too weak to stand.
The house suddenly felt enormous, like a ship
without a captain.
Ajab automatically moved towards the kitchen –
her instinct shaped by years.
But a hand stopped her.
Burhanuddin.
"I'll do it," he said.
"You sit."
And for the first time in their lives, they swapped
roles:
Ajab sat.
Burhan worked

28

She guided him from a distance, but he insisted on doing everything himself—
wiping sweat, rolling misshapen rotis,
sprinkling too much salt,
dropping a spoon twice.

The kitchen smelled like disaster
But to Ajab, it smelled like fairness.



The next evening, while their mother rested, the siblings made dal-chawal together. The dal was watery, the rice slightly sticky, but they cooked it with shared effort, shared mistakes, and shared laughter.

It was the first dinner they had truly made together.

After eating, Burhan suddenly said:

“Ajab... I didn’t know it was this much work.”

Ajab nodded quietly.

“You’re strong,” he added.

Burhanuddin's transformation wasn't
overnight.

Some days he got tired.
Some days he forgot.
Some days he pretended to forget.

But something inside him had shifted.
He was no longer doing
chores to "help Ajab."

He was doing them because they were
his responsibility too.

And that difference—that simple shift
of mindset—was the real miracle
burhanuddin's life but also ajab's.

The miracle worked in a different
way in the life of Ajab

She learned to say "No."
She learned to ask for help.
She learned that fairness wasn't
selfishness.

She learned that her feelings
mattered—even if she had been
taught to swallow them.

For so long, she had believed silence
was strength.

When guests came, they were
pleasantly shocked.

"Burhan! You cut the salad?"

"Yes."

"You served the juice?"

"Why not?"



33

Aunts raised their eyebrows.
Uncles laughed, impressed.
His father watched with quiet pride.

And soon, something magical
happened:

Cousins noticed.

Neighbors noticed.

Friends noticed.

One of Burhan's classmates even
asked him:

"Bro... how do you fold laundry like
that? Teach me."

34

One night, while studying together,
Burhan suddenly said:

"Ajab.. I think boys should learn these
things the same way girls do."

Ajab smiled softly.
"Why?"

"Because one day, I'll have a home too,"
he said, shrugging.

"And a partner. And I don't want her
to feel lonely the way you
did."

Ajab looked at him for a long moment.

"Thank you," she whispered.
He grinned.

"Don't thank me. Thank yourself.
You taught me."

35

This story is not about a perfect boy
who suddenly became responsible.

It is about a child who was never
taught.

It is about a girl who carried too much
too early.

It is about a society that trains its
daughters for life but forgets to train its
sons for partnership.

Equality does not mean taking skills
away from girls.

It means giving them to boys too.

36

Weeks later, their mother fully recovered.
The house returned to noise, laughter,
routine,

—
But something was different now.
Ajab did not work alone.
Burhan did not take the hone for granted.

One Saturday morning, their mother
walked into the courtyard and stopped in her tracks.

Ajab was rinsing vegetables.
Burhan was sweeping.
They were talking, teasing, smiling.
Working together.
Not of sadness.
Of hope.

37

That evening, as the sun dipped behind
the roofs and evening prayers echoed through
the neighborhood, Burhan nudged Ajab.

"Come," he said, lifting a cricket bat, "let's
play for a bit."

Ajab laughed.

"No chores?"

"Chores can wait," he said, "if we do them
together later."

She picked up the ball.
He took his stance.

A new kind of childhood began—one built
not on old rules, but on shared responsibility,
shared respect, and shared freedom.

38

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A new kind of childhood began—one built not on old rules, but on shared responsibility, shared respect, and shared freedom.

38

*Because when boys learn what girls
have been taught for generations —
a home becomes not a burden for
one...
but a belonging for all.*

THE END

39

SUMMARY

Ajab, an eleven-year-old girl, spends most of her time doing household chores while her brother Burhanuddin plays outside freely. Their family has followed the unspoken rule that girls work and boys relax. One day, Ajab quietly admits she is tired, and for the first time Burhan realizes how unfair her burden is.

He begins helping — clumsily at first — but slowly learns the responsibilities he was never taught. Their mother, noticing the imbalance, starts asking Burhan to share the work instead of expecting everything from Ajab. This shift brings arguments, struggles, and small victories, but it also brings a home stronger.

In the end, Ajab and Burhan build a new kind of relationship — based on teamwork, respect, and equal freedom.

40

Reflections

Writing this story helped me express my ideas clearly and creatively. My aim was to present a meaningful message through simple narration and relatable characters. I focused on showing how choices and actions shape a person's life.

The story conveys important moral values such as honesty, kindness, responsibility, and perseverance. It teaches that facing challenges with courage and integrity leads to personal growth. Through this project, I improved my writing skills, creativity, and confidence.

Overall, this experience has strengthened my interest in writing and motivated me to keep improving as an author.

Fatema Khachrodwala



While writing this story, I didn't need research or statistics. I didn't need to search for examples. This story was already around me in homes, in conversations, in everyday life.

From a certain age, girls are gently trained to behave a particular way. They are told to help in the kitchen, to be responsible, to learn household work because "one day you'll be someone's wife." It is said so normally that no one questions it.

But what struck me while writing was this: No one gathers boys and says, "Learn this because one day you'll be someone's husband."

No one reminds them that they will also build a home, raise children, and share responsibilities.

It is not wrong to teach girls these skills. In fact, it makes them strong and capable. What feels incomplete even unfair is not raising boys with the same mindset of partnership and responsibility.

Ajab represents countless girls across India who grow up being praised for being "good" when they are actually carrying too much too soon. Burhanuddin is not a villain he is simply untrained, shaped by a system that prepared him for freedom but not for empathy.

This story, for me, is not about chores. It is about balance. It is about preparing both daughters and sons not just for marriage but for shared life.

Because a home should not be a burden for one.

It should be a responsibility for all. And that is why I wrote this story not because it is rare, but because it is common.

And common things, when questioned, have the power to transform everything.

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