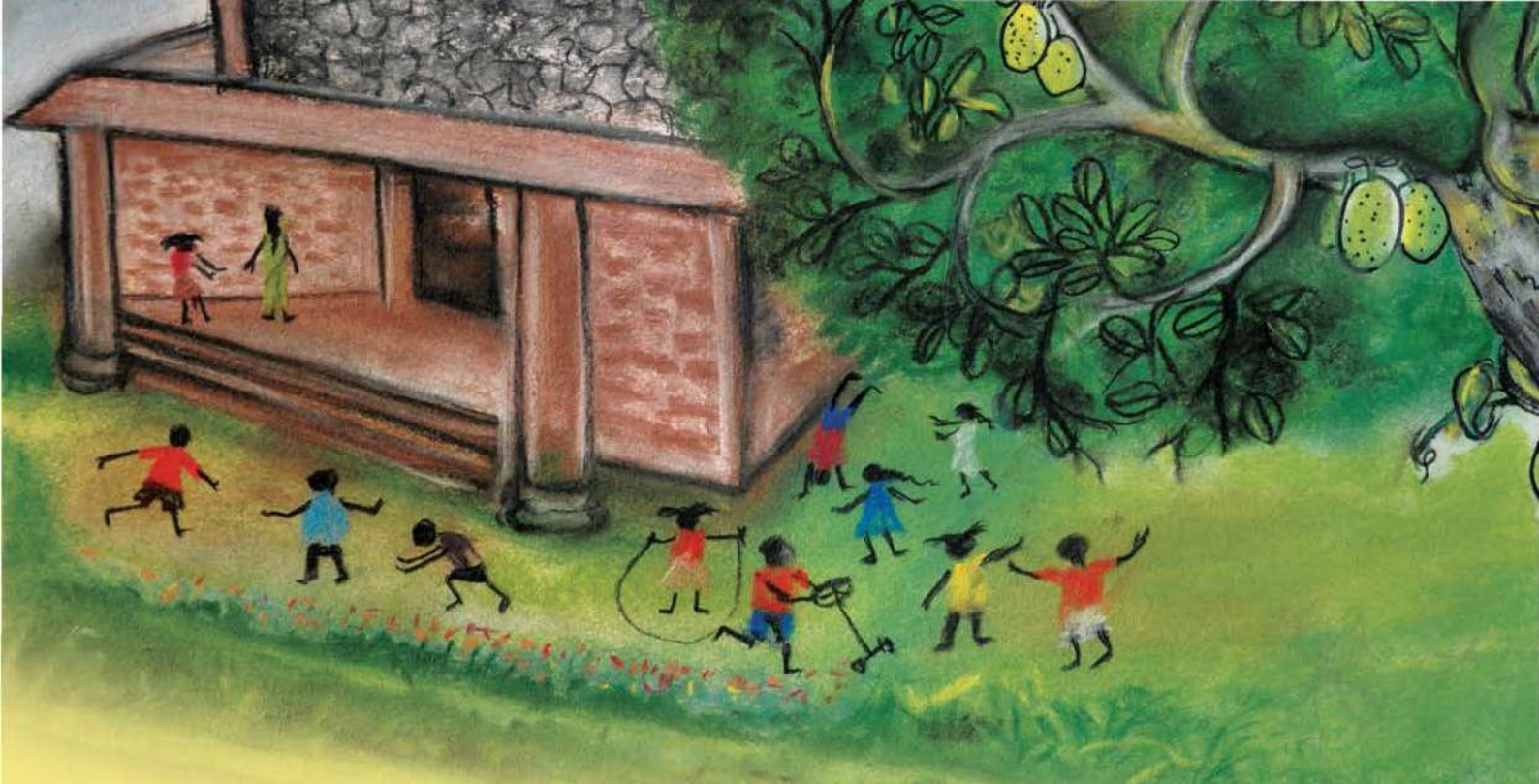


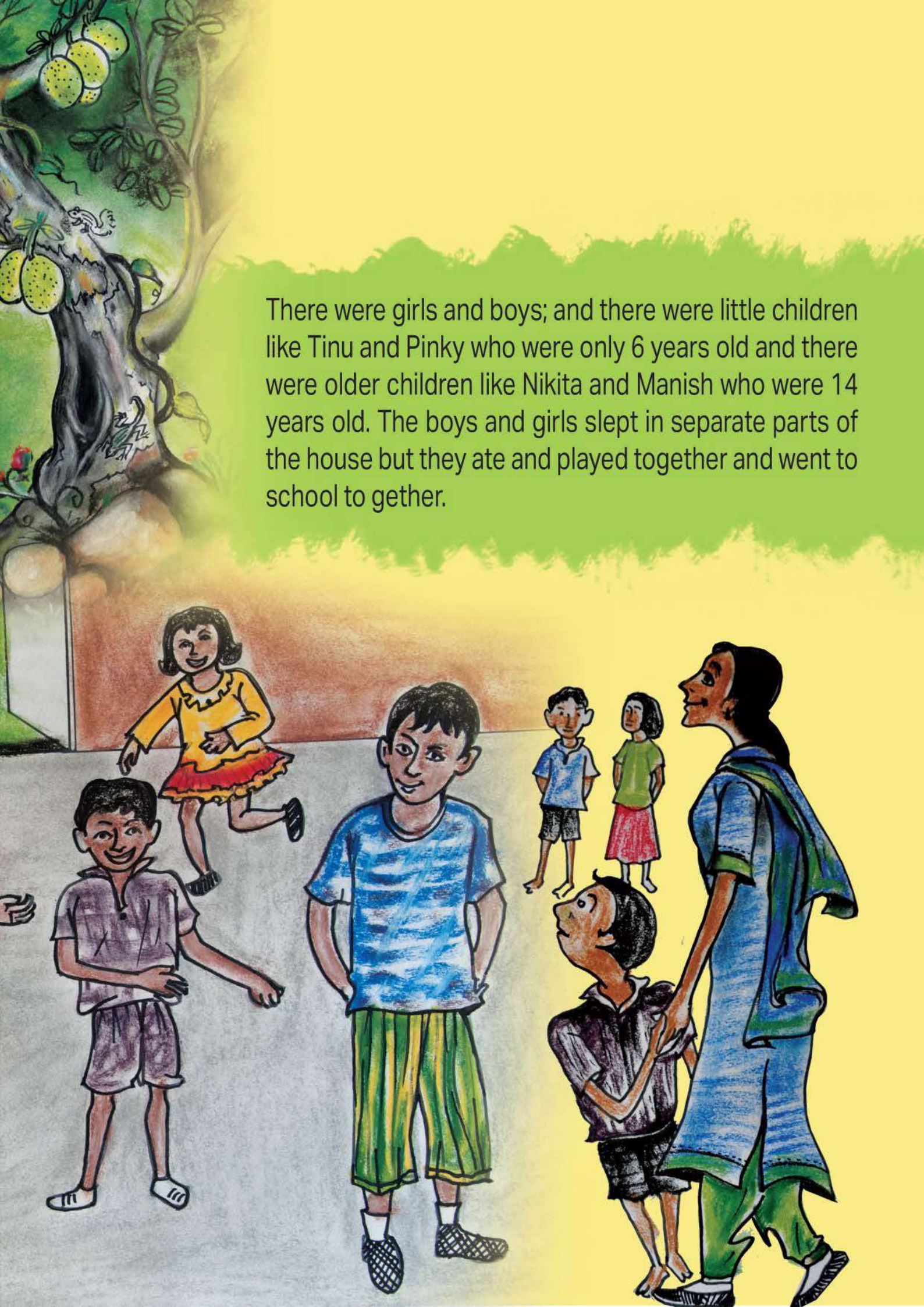


Ankit's Story

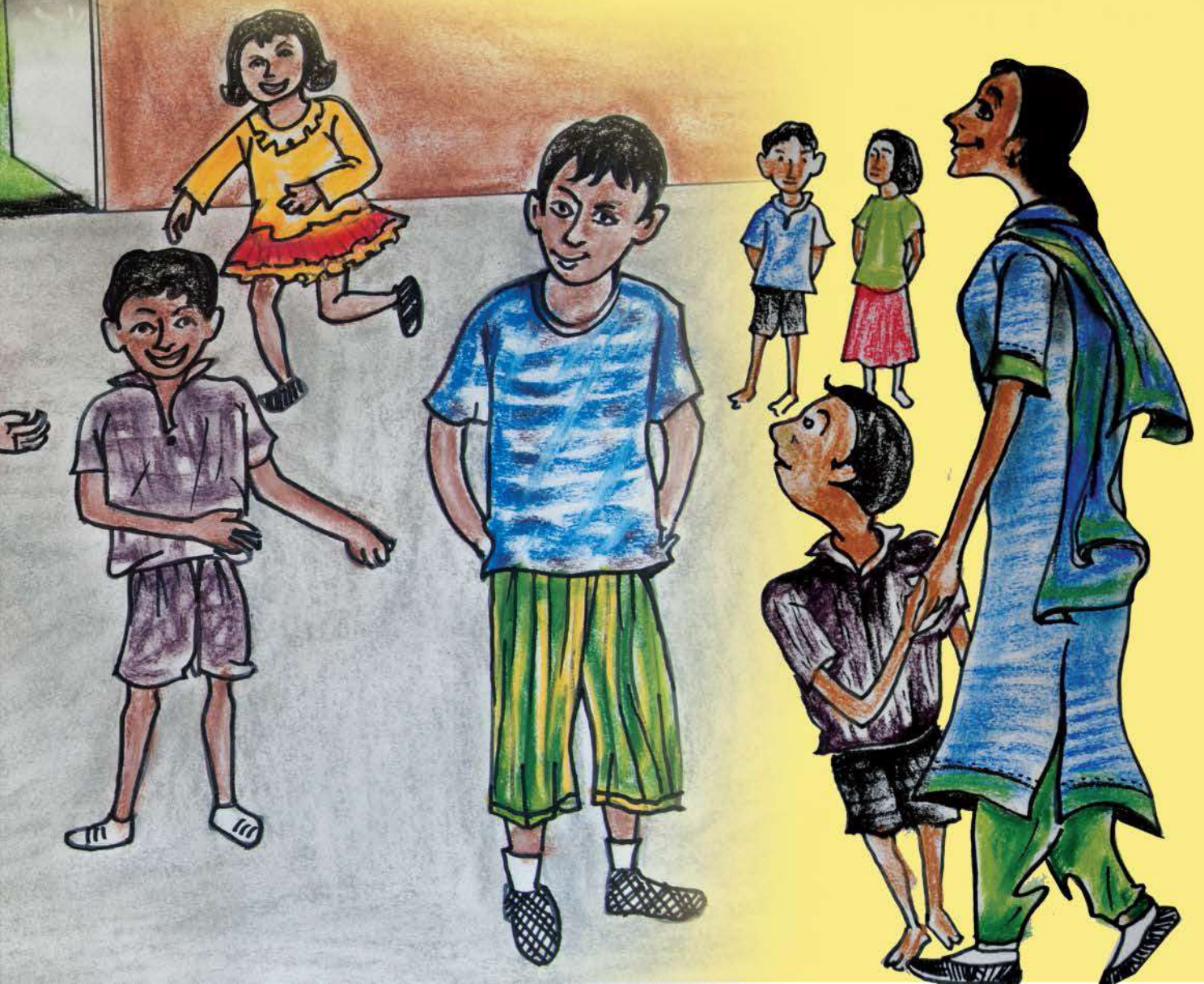


Once upon a time, there was large house in which many children lived.





There were girls and boys; and there were little children like Tinu and Pinky who were only 6 years old and there were older children like Nikita and Manish who were 14 years old. The boys and girls slept in separate parts of the house but they ate and played together and went to school together.





What was different about this house was that there were no mothers and fathers. Instead, there were 2 akkas who took care of the children – Lakshmi Akka and Minu akka. Lakshmi akka was round and fat and jolly and the children loved to play with her; Minu akka was tall and thin and strict about children being neat and tidy, going to school on time and finishing their food. But both the akkas loved the children and took great care of them.



One day, the children came home from school to find a new person who had come to live with them. He was sitting hunched over the dining table, trying to be hidden, and not eating his food.

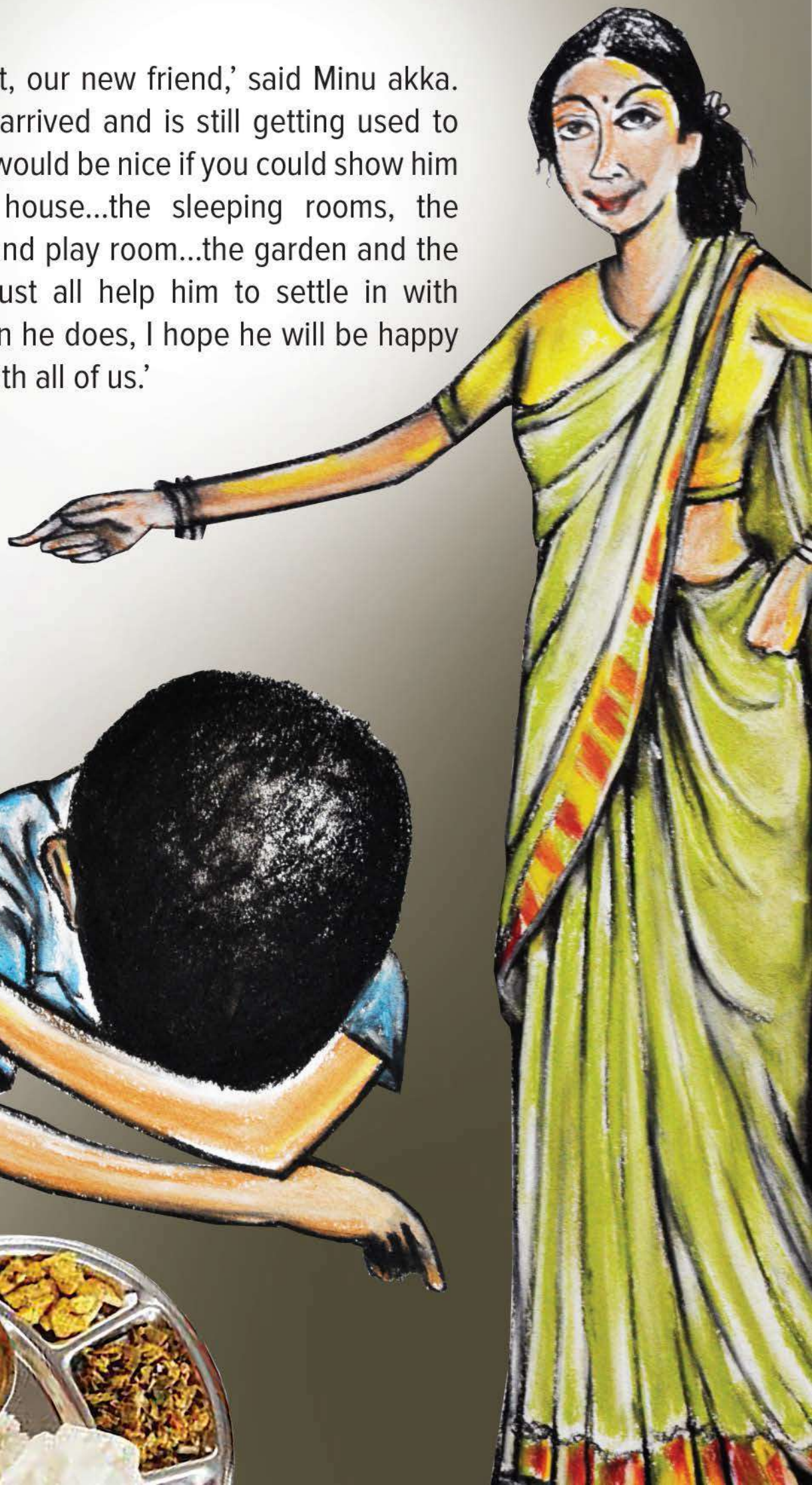
'Hi,' said Manish, 'what's your name?'

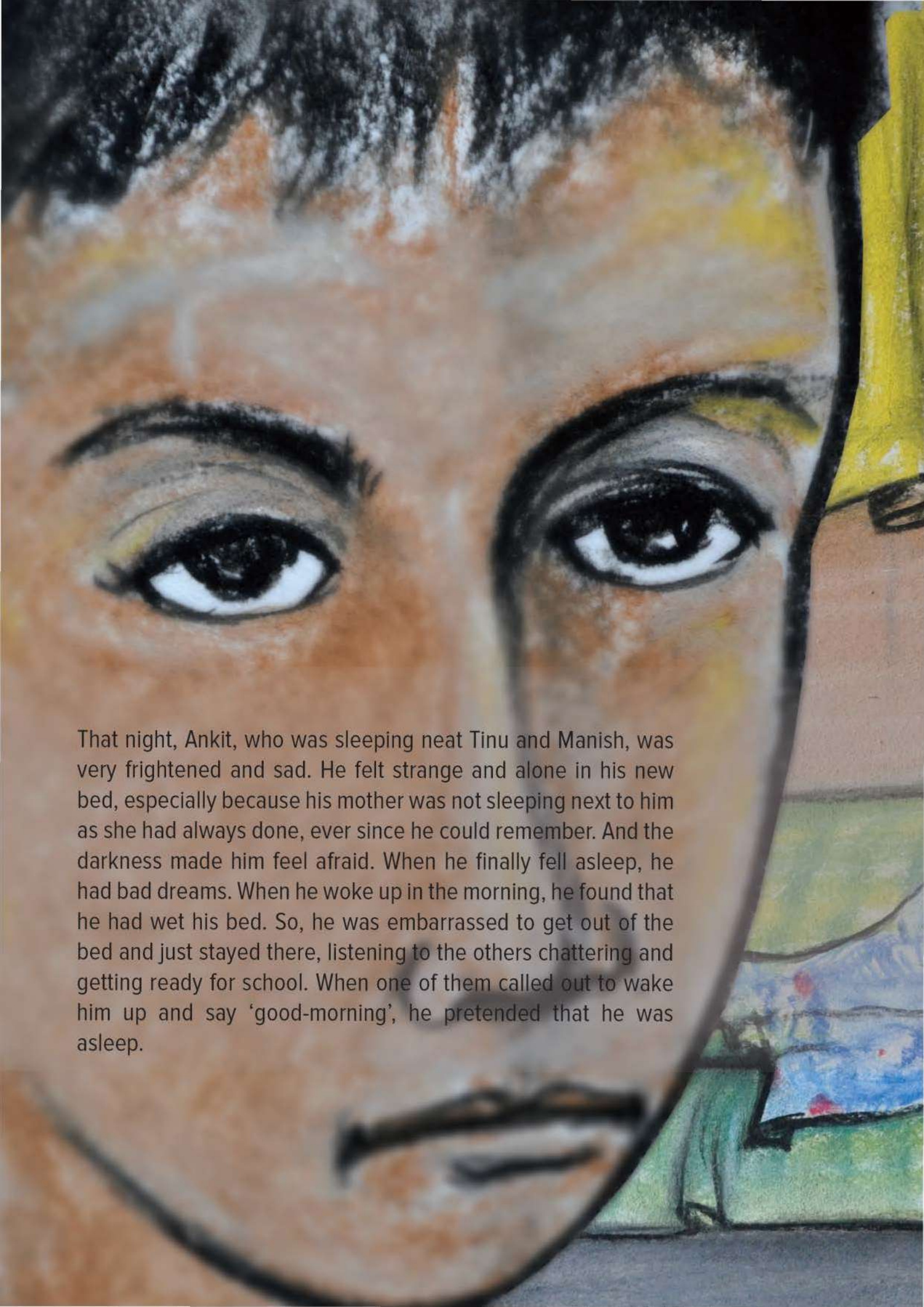
No answer.

'Want to play kunte bille with us?' asked Tinu.



‘This is Ankit, our new friend,’ said Minu akka. ‘He has just arrived and is still getting used to our home. It would be nice if you could show him around the house...the sleeping rooms, the study room and play room...the garden and the trees. We must all help him to settle in with us...and when he does, I hope he will be happy living here with all of us.’





That night, Ankit, who was sleeping neat Tinu and Manish, was very frightened and sad. He felt strange and alone in his new bed, especially because his mother was not sleeping next to him as she had always done, ever since he could remember. And the darkness made him feel afraid. When he finally fell asleep, he had bad dreams. When he woke up in the morning, he found that he had wet his bed. So, he was embarrassed to get out of the bed and just stayed there, listening to the others chattering and getting ready for school. When one of them called out to wake him up and say 'good-morning', he pretended that he was asleep.



After a while, the house seemed quite. Everyone must have gone to school, he thought. As he was wondering what to do, Lakshmi akka suddenly appeared. The bed creaked as she sat down beside him.

‘Hello’, she said gently. ‘You are awake; I see...would you like to get dressed and eat some breakfast?’

‘No’, said Ankit, burying his face in his pillow. ‘I want to go home to my mother.’

‘I know that you are sad and upset about leaving home...and that you really miss your mother,’ said Lakshmi akka, stroking his head.



'Why am I here? Where is my mother? Why has she gone away?' sobbed Ankit.

'I understand that you are frightened and confused about being here,' said Lakshmi akka. 'You remember your mother was very ill...and that she was in hospital...that was the time you went to stay with your aunty Neena for few days. The doctors tried very hard to make your mother well but they could not; the sickness did not go away and she was unable to survive. So, since your mother is no longer there to look after you, your aunty Nina brought you here, so you could live with us... and so that we could take care of you and make sure that you are not alone...and make sure you are safe and well.'



‘But where did my mummy go? Why did she leave me? Did she not love me?’ cried Ankit.

‘When people are very sick and do not get well. They don’t live in this world (where we do) anymore. They can’t breathe, eat, walk, talk, or work...so they do not exist with us any more or we say that they have died. Different people believe different things about where dead people go – some of us may believe that they go to God, some believe that they become stars in the sky or trees or flowers...what would you like to believe about where your mother went?’

‘May be she became a star...so she can see me every night,’ said Ankit, thoughtfully.

‘Then that is where is ... in the sky, as a star’, said Akka. ‘And like you said, she watches over you. She did not want to leave you- she really loved you and still does. She became very ill and that is why she was unable to continue to be with you. I know you are really think about her and miss her but we are here for you- to look after you and to love you.’







And so Ankit, though still sad, slowly got dressed and ate some food. He spent the morning with Lakshmi akka, helping her in the kitchen and telling her about his home and his mother, She said that they could ask his aunty Nina and try and get a picture of his mother to keep with him so that he could remember her and feel strong and brave all the time.

When the children came from school, Ankit agreed to play with them. Over the next few days, they showed him their favourite trees in the garden, their secret spots and special games. He still thought about his mother and missed her but he slowly felt better and happier because he knew that the two akkas would take care of him and because he had lots of children to be friends with and to play with – in fact, he had a new home and a big new family!

Community Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service Project,
Department of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry,
National Institute of Mental Health & Neurosciences (NIMHANS)
(Institute Of National Importance)
Hosur Road, Benaaluru - 560029

Website : www.nimhans.ac.in
Email : capnimhans@gmail.com

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