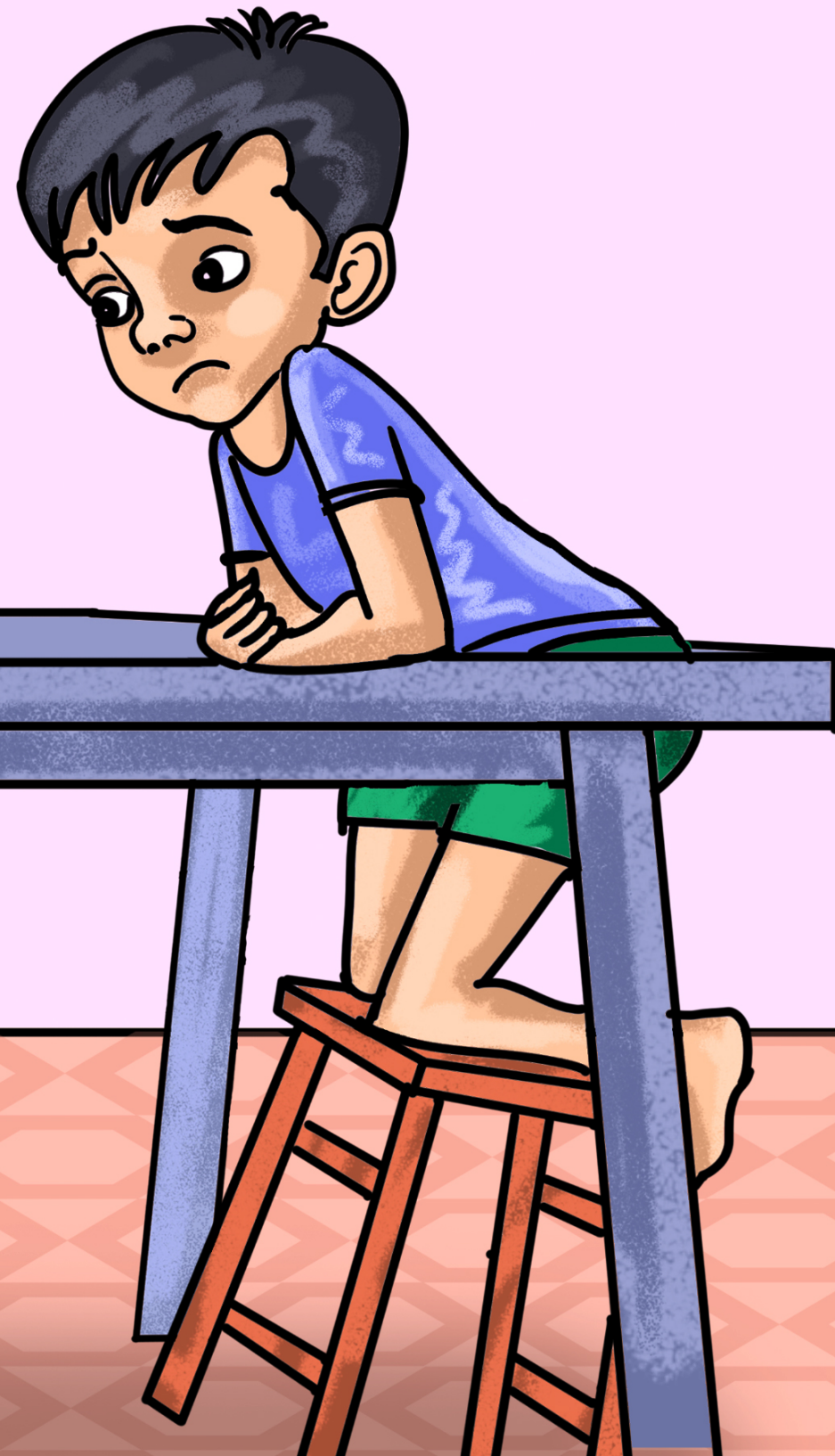
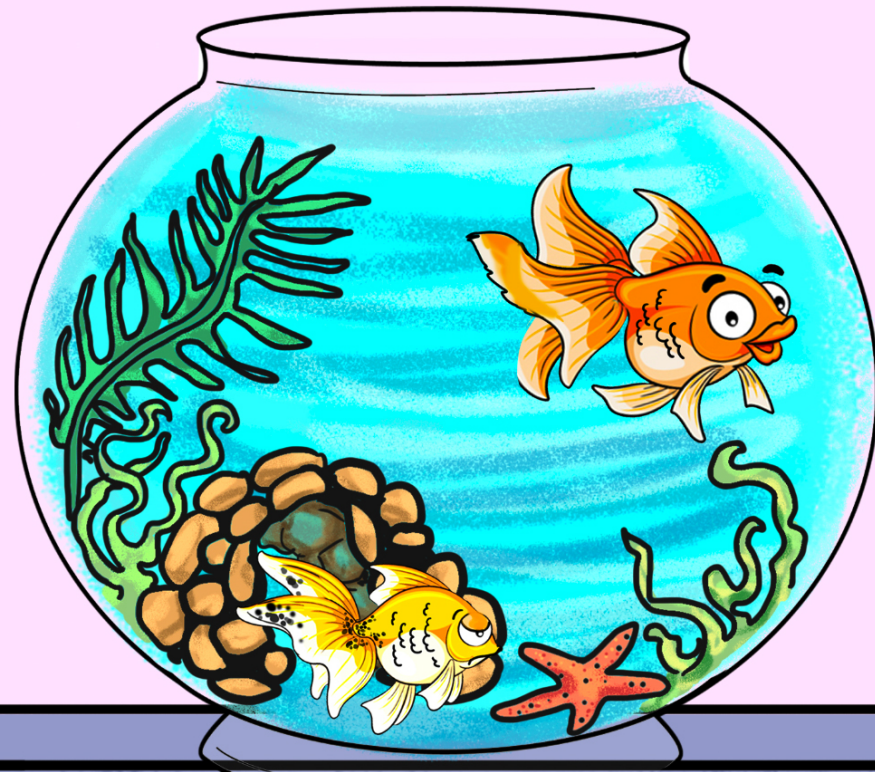
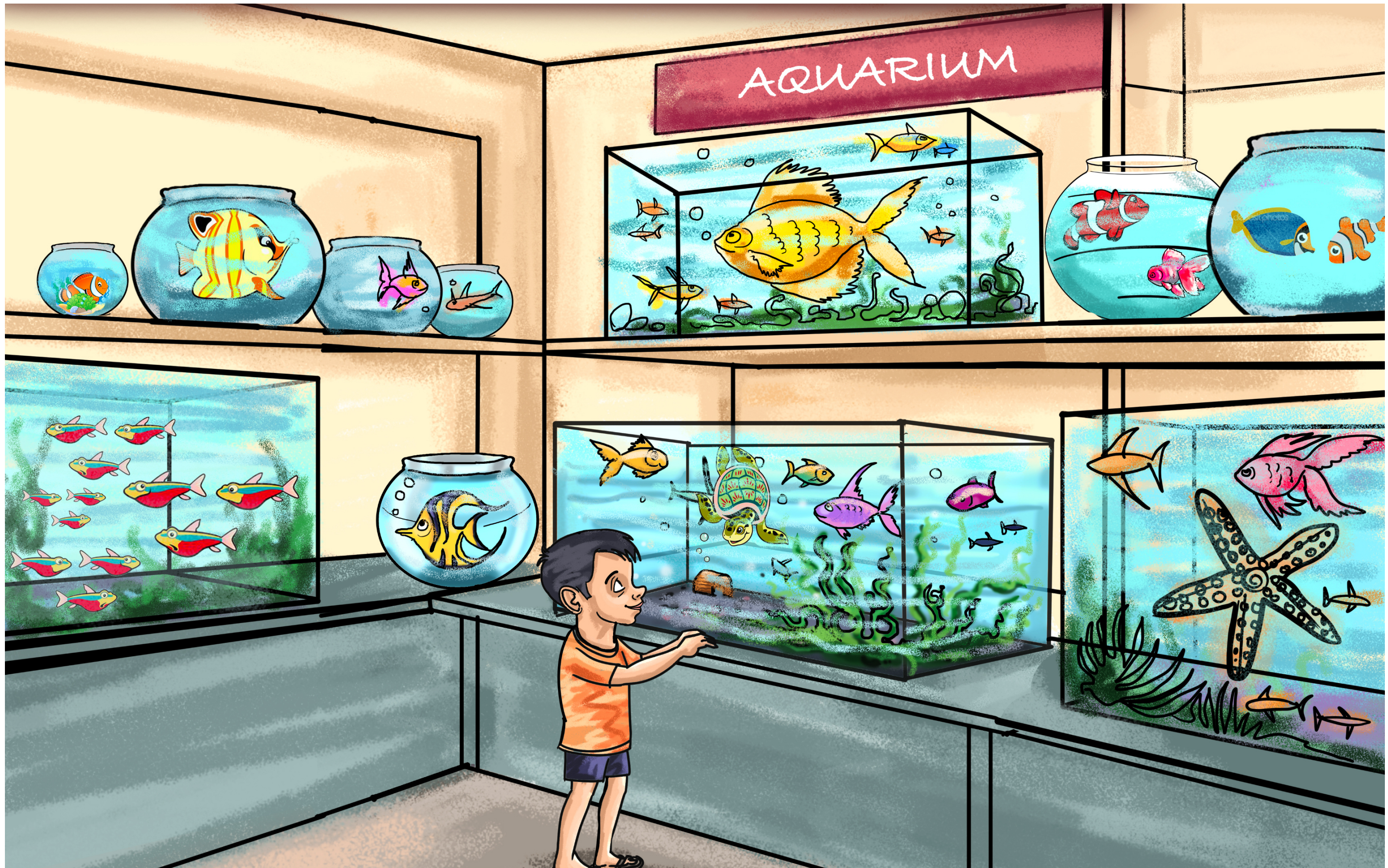
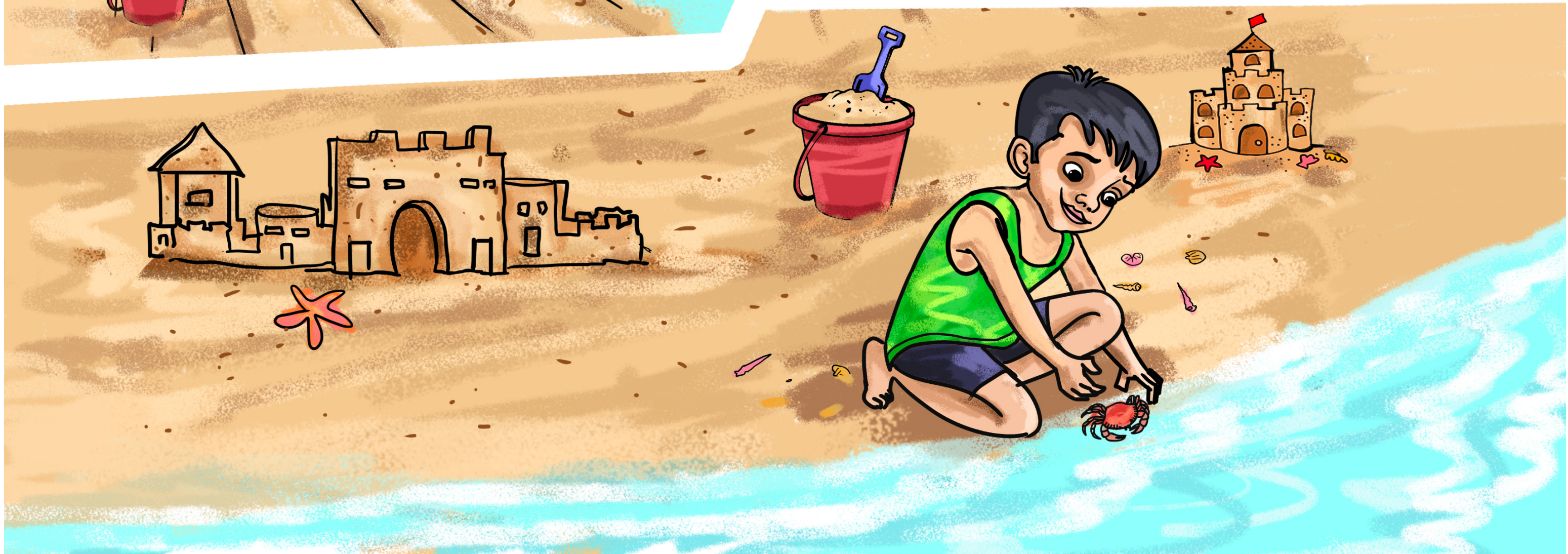
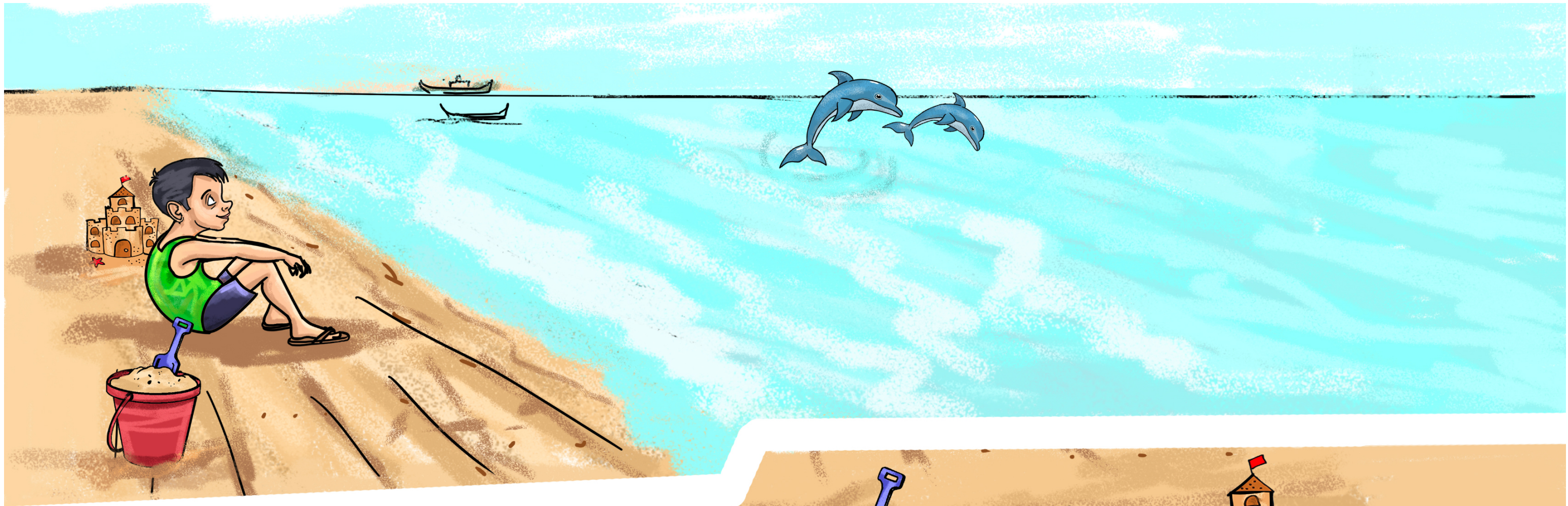


# When Spots Went Away

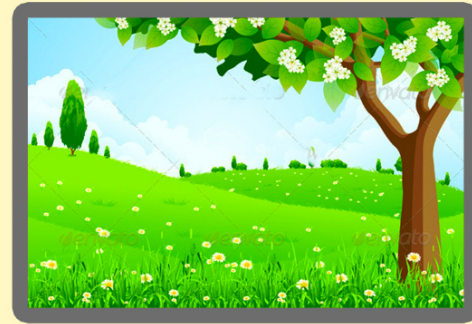




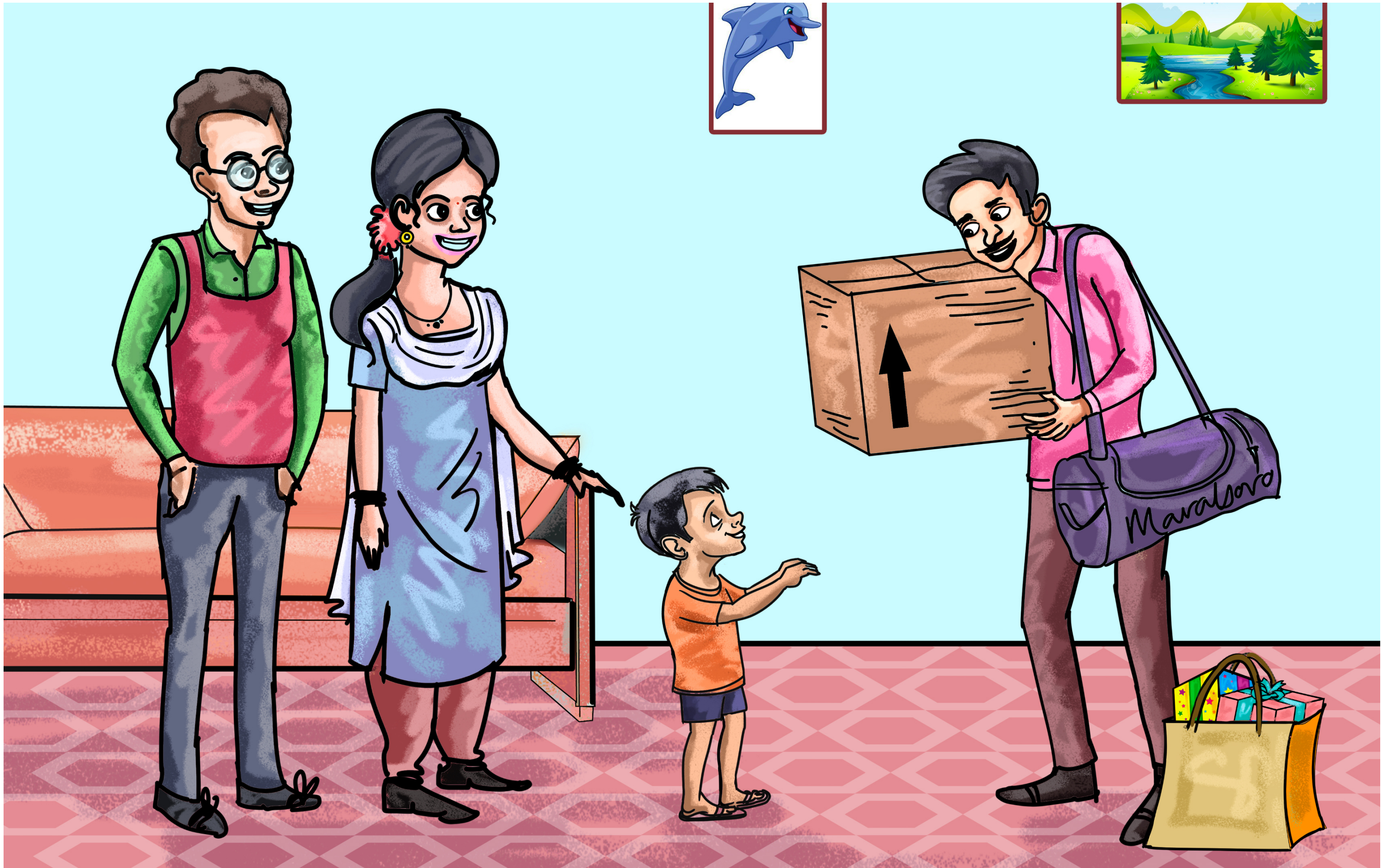
Tariq was very fond of going to the aquarium. Although he was only eight years old, he knew a lot about fish-- not just fish, he knew a lot about other marine animals as well. The aquarium was his favourite place. He could spend hours there watching the big fish and small ones, colourful ones and the exotic ones.



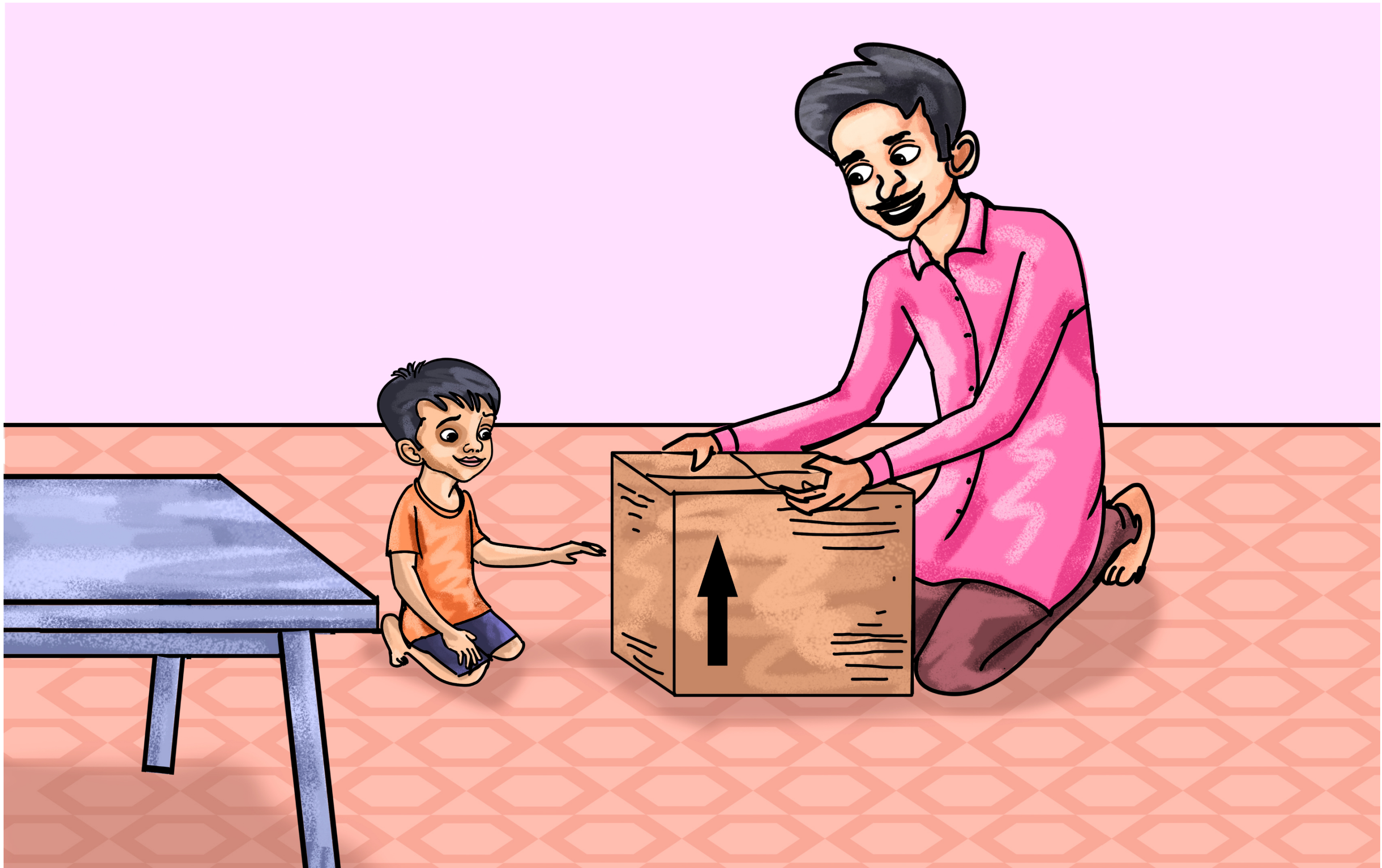
Since he lived near the sea, he would often go the sea side to see dolphins jump out of the sea. And he was amazed by the speed with which crabs would crawl out of the waves and bury themselves in sand and swim out again.



He had also seen TV shows of well-known sea travellers and loved their fish stories. He often dreamt of having a small aquarium at home. But times were tough for his family, especially now, as they were saving money to get the repairs done. So he did not feel like it would be the right time to ask his parents for an aquarium and pet fish.

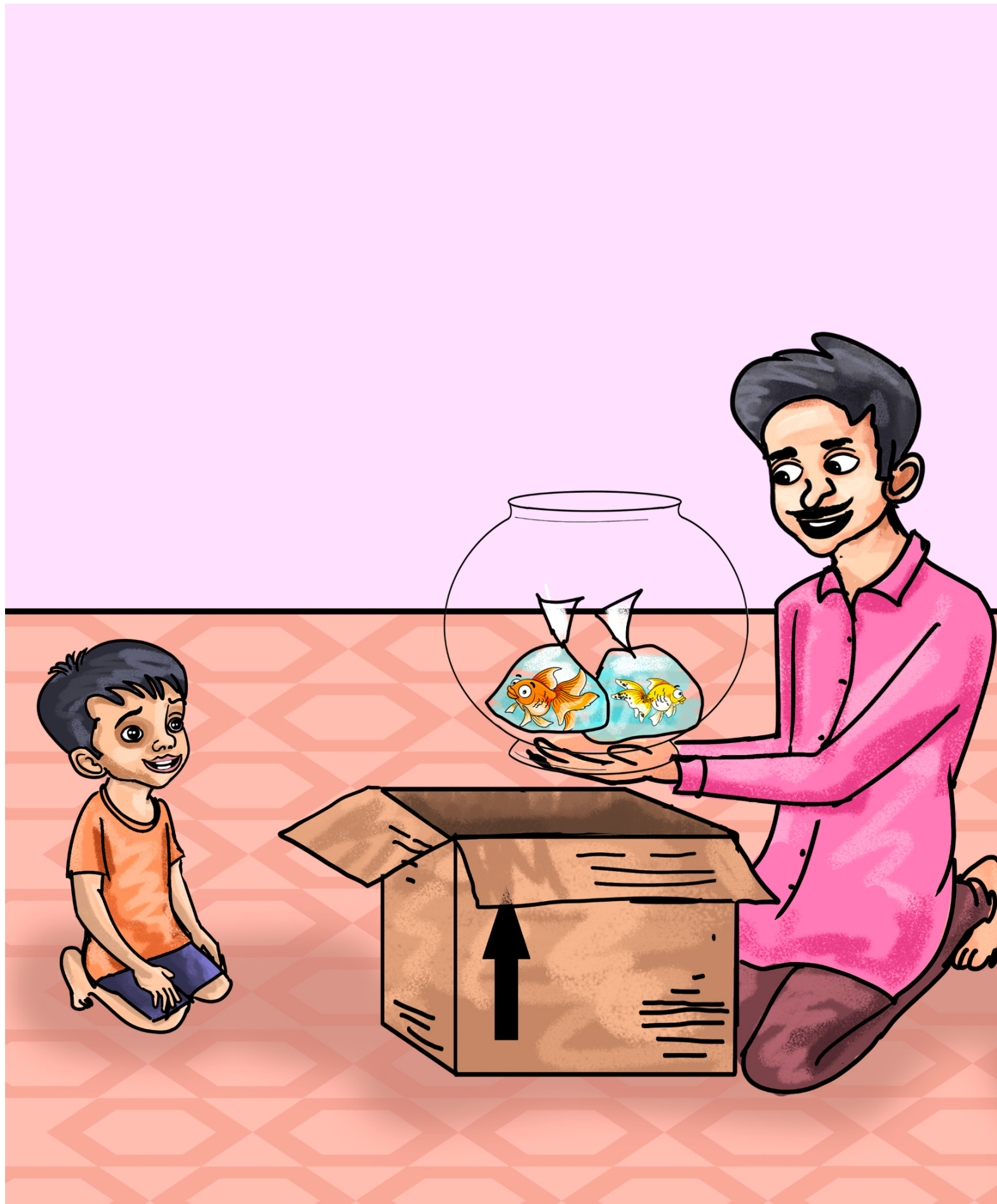


Then one day, his uncle Ahmed visited them from abroad. He brought many gifts and goodies. He spent a lot of time with Tariq and was proud to see just how much knowledge he had about various fish and their habitat and diet. The day before Uncle Ahmed left, he came to Tariq's home, holding a large object covered with brown paper.

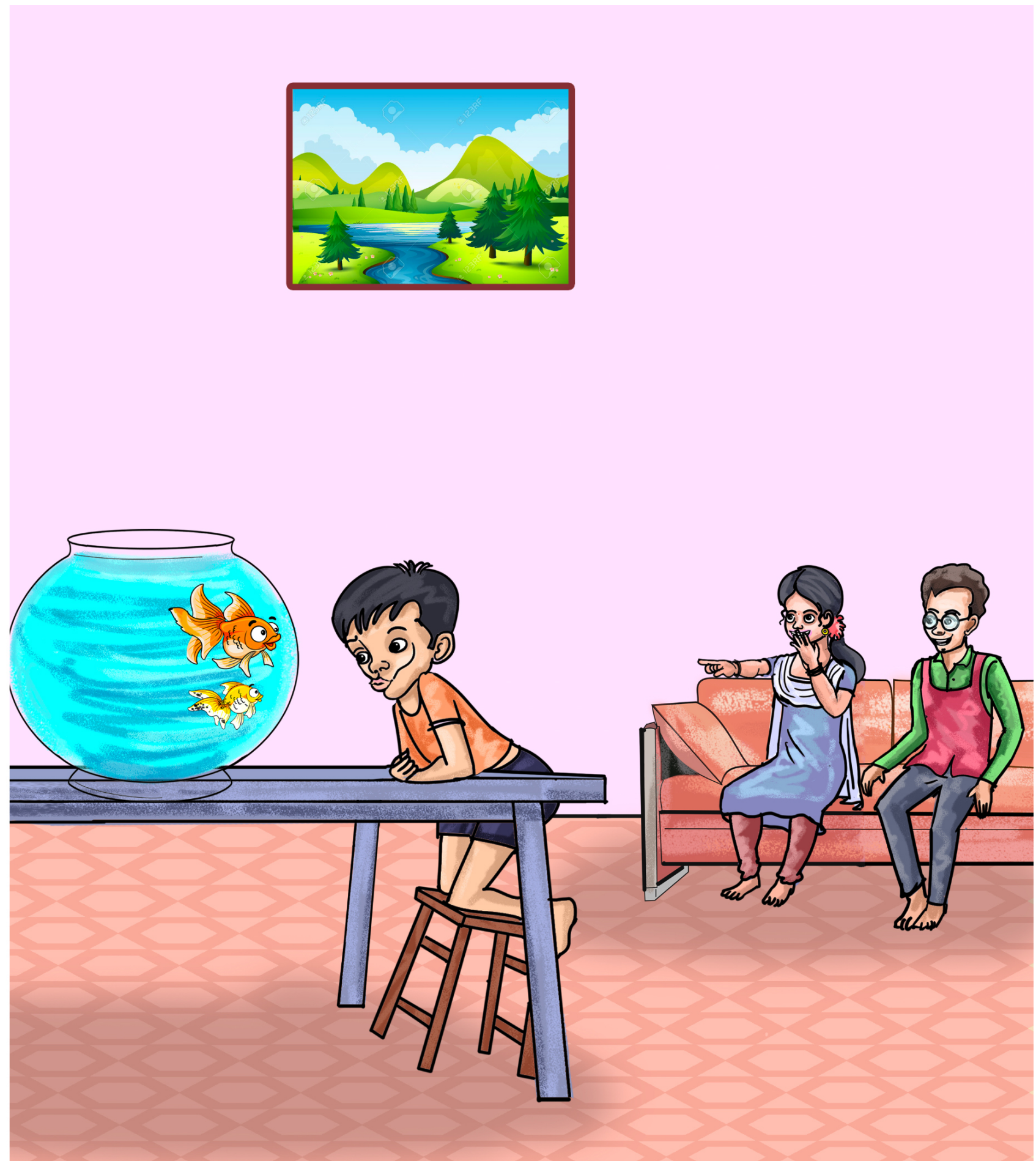


"What is it?" asked Tariq curiously.

"Ahaaa...it is a surprise for you...let us open it...I believe you will love it!" said Uncle Ahmed.

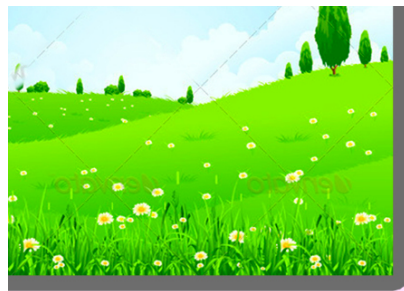


Uncle Ahmed placed the object on the floor with a twinkle in his eye and dramatically opened the paper covers. Tariq nearly stopped breathing...for, there it was!! A round glass bowl, with two gold fish in it! Tariq's happiness knew no bounds. He hugged his uncle with tears in his eyes and thanked him profusely.

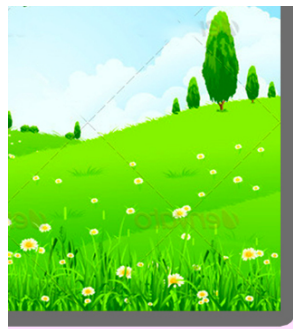


Tariq read up on how to take care of goldfish, what to feed them, how to aerate the fish bowl. He asked his dad for some money to buy fish food and rushed to the market to get it. That night, he fed the fish and laughed as he saw them gobbling up the pellets. He made his family laugh by imitating the way the gold fish puckered their mouths to eat and breathe!

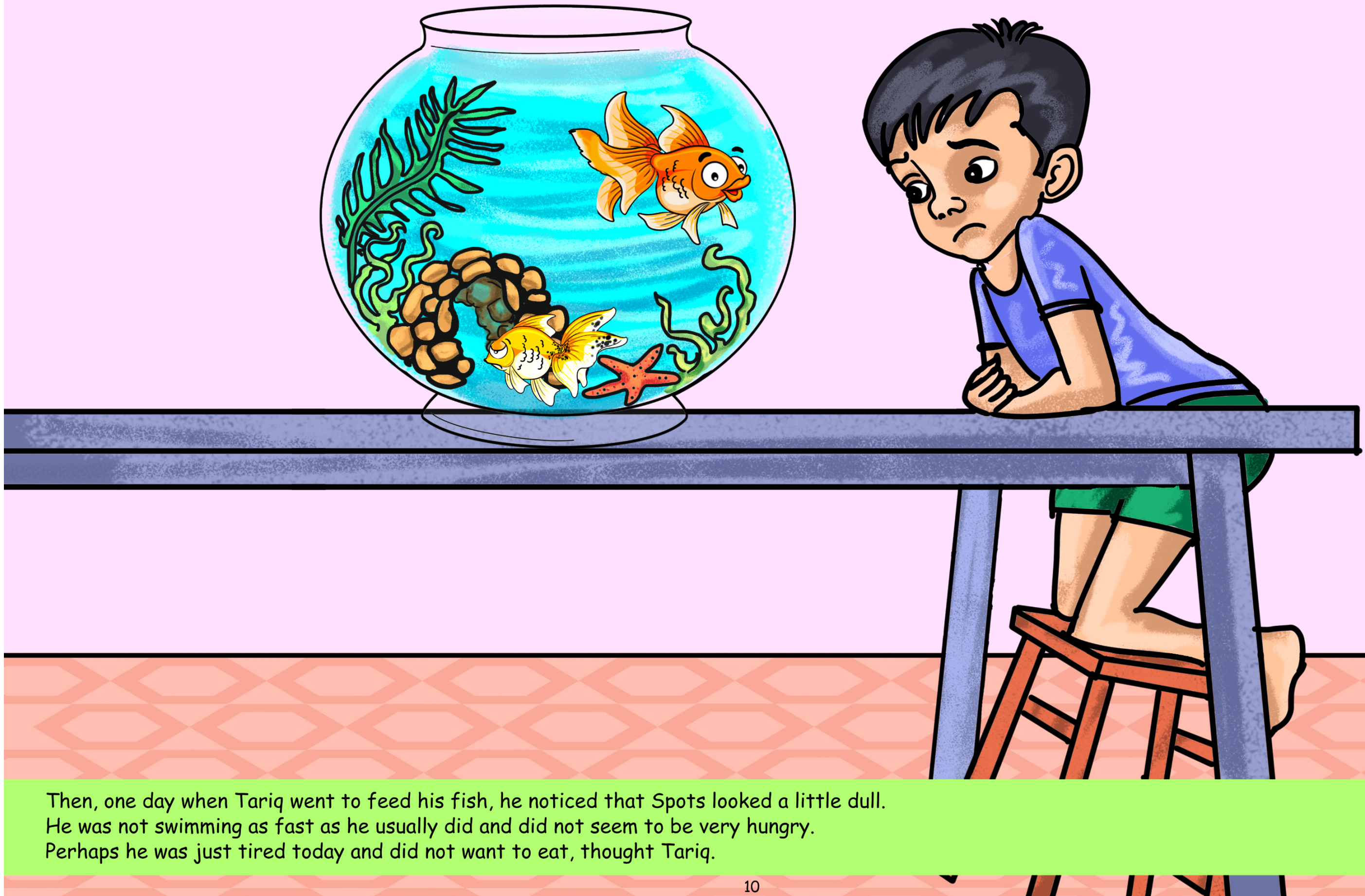




He awoke in excitement each morning...his first thought was for his new pets...and he rushed to the fish bowl and was happy to greet his two dear fish. He tried to tell them apart: he noticed that one was a little larger and the other, had a small black marking on the tail. He named the larger one *Goldie*, and the spotted one, *Spots*.



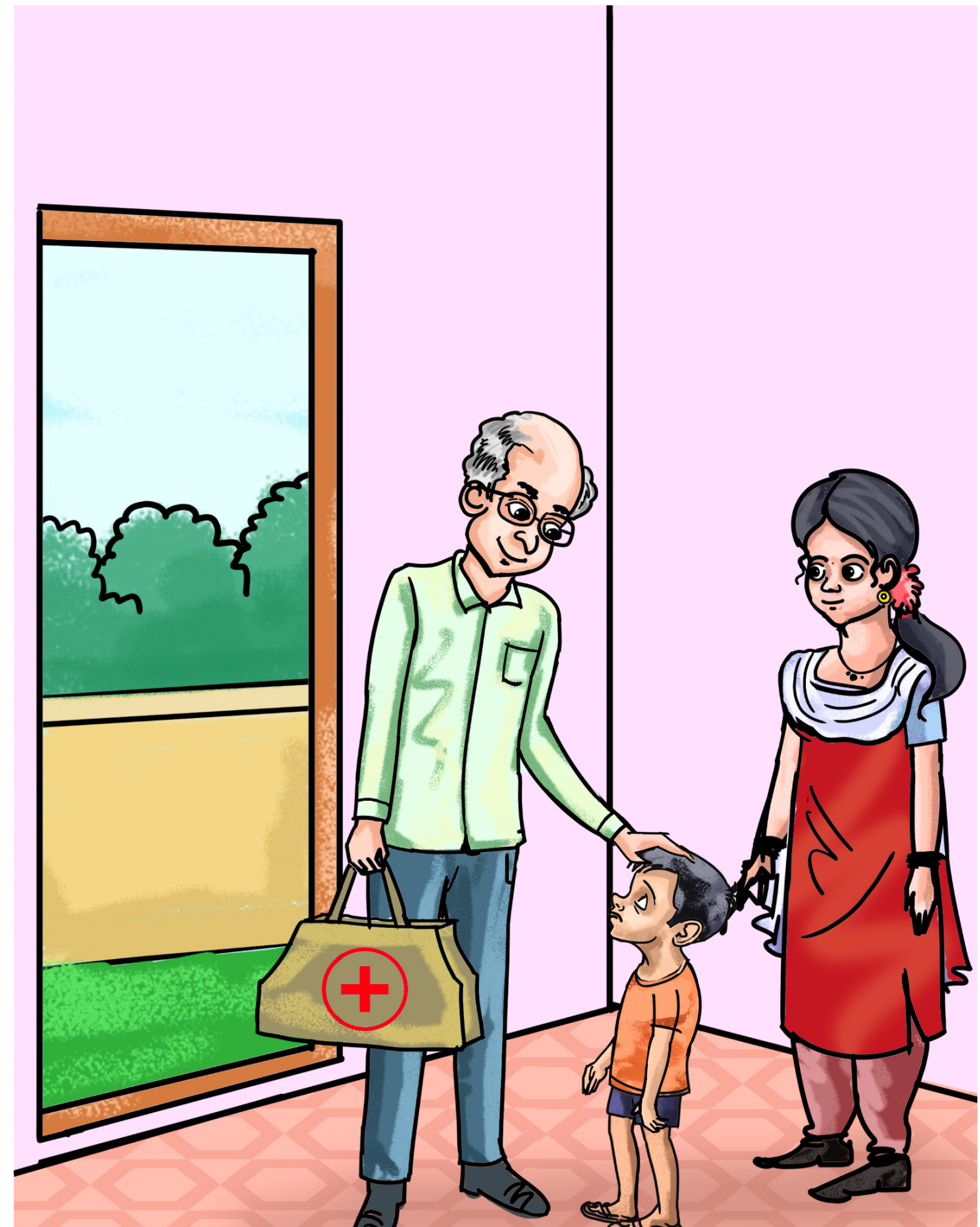
Every night and morning it was his joy to feed his fish and see them swim and play. Over time, Tariq decided to decorate his fish bowl with small toy plants and rocks and coloured stones, arranging them to form caves and passages. His two fish companions, Goldie and Spots loved swimming through the passages, in and out of the caves. And Tariq loved watching their swimming movements.



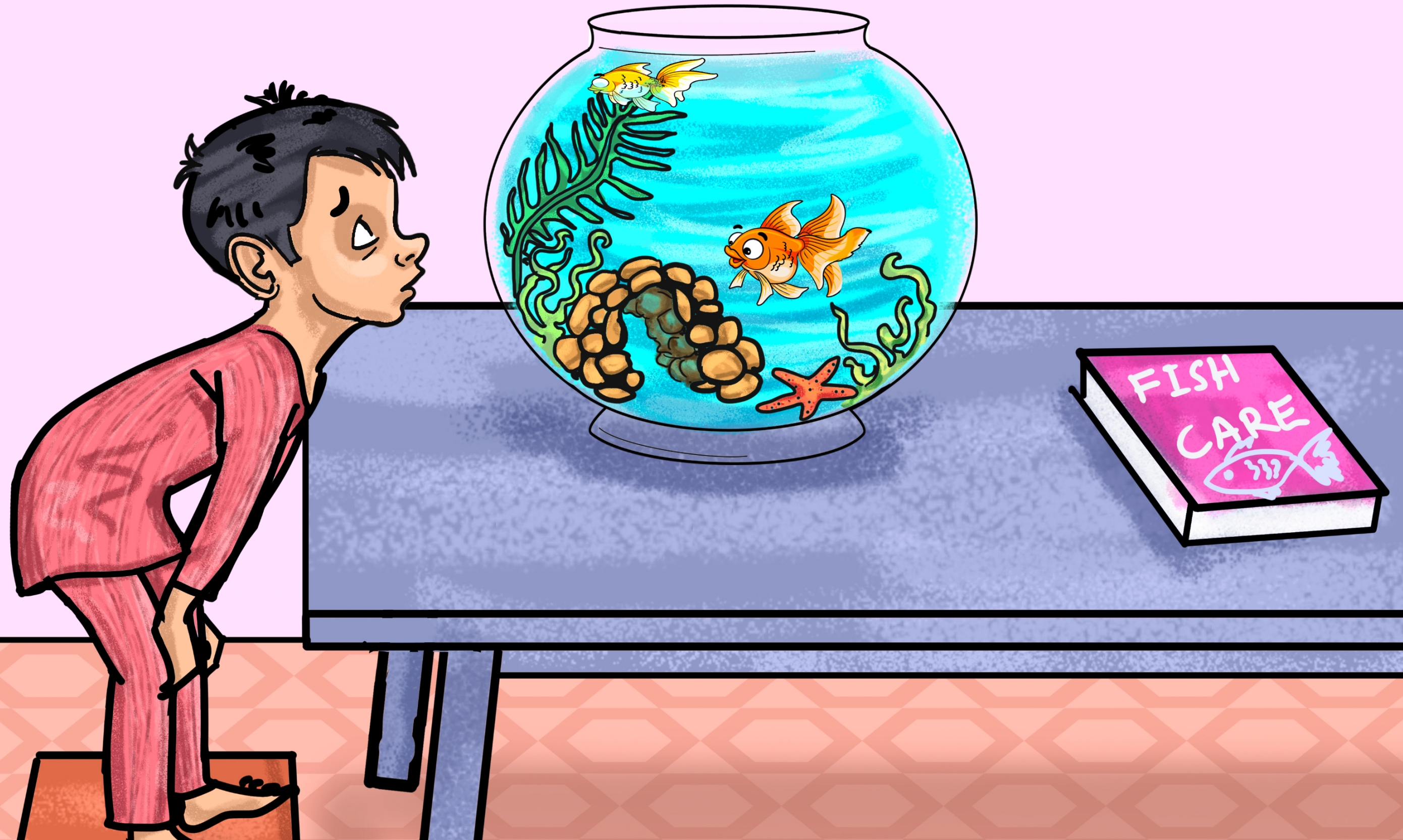
Then, one day when Tariq went to feed his fish, he noticed that Spots looked a little dull. He was not swimming as fast as he usually did and did not seem to be very hungry. Perhaps he was just tired today and did not want to eat, thought Tariq.



But Tariq was also starting to worry about his pet.  
What could be the matter with spots?  
He was always so active and playful...I hope he will be alright, thought Tariq.



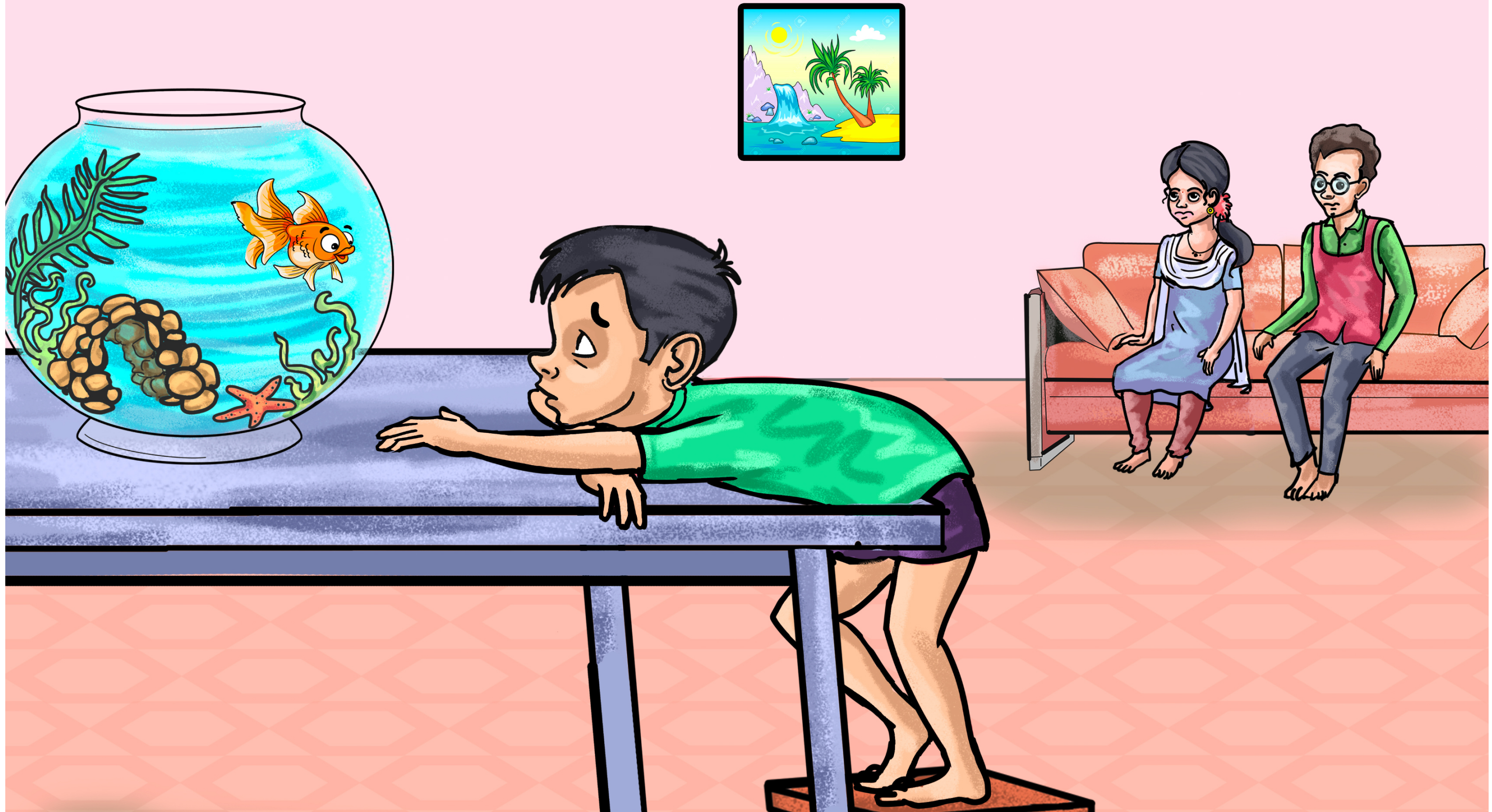
The next day, Tariq's mother called the animal doctor—someone who knew all about the sicknesses of animals. The doctor told Tariq that Spots was very sick, but that he would try his best to cure him. He also gave Spots some medicine. "Will Spots be alright? I want him to get well..." said Tariq, very worried now. "I hope so," said the doctor.



The next morning, Tariq ran to the fish bowl to see if Spots was better. Through sleepy eyes he saw Goldie swimming around and felt relieved. But then he realized he could not see Spots. He peered closely and found spots floating at the top of the bowl. Spots did not appear to be swimming or breathing.



Tariq quickly scooped him out with a net and tried to coax him to breathe by gently prodding him and gently blowing near his mouth. Spots still refused to move or respond. In panic, Tariq cried out for his parents. They also tried to see if they could revive Spots. But Spots was dead.



Tariq could not believe what had happened. His fish friend gone!!  
Why had it happened? How had it happened?  
And how was Goldie feeling? Goldie was swimming alone and appeared to be looking for his companion.  
Tariq was very sad and shed many tears.  
He still fed and cared for Goldie regularly although he didn't rush to the fish tank as he used to earlier.  
But he also spent more time near the fish tank looking at Goldie...I hope nothing happens to Goldie, he thought.





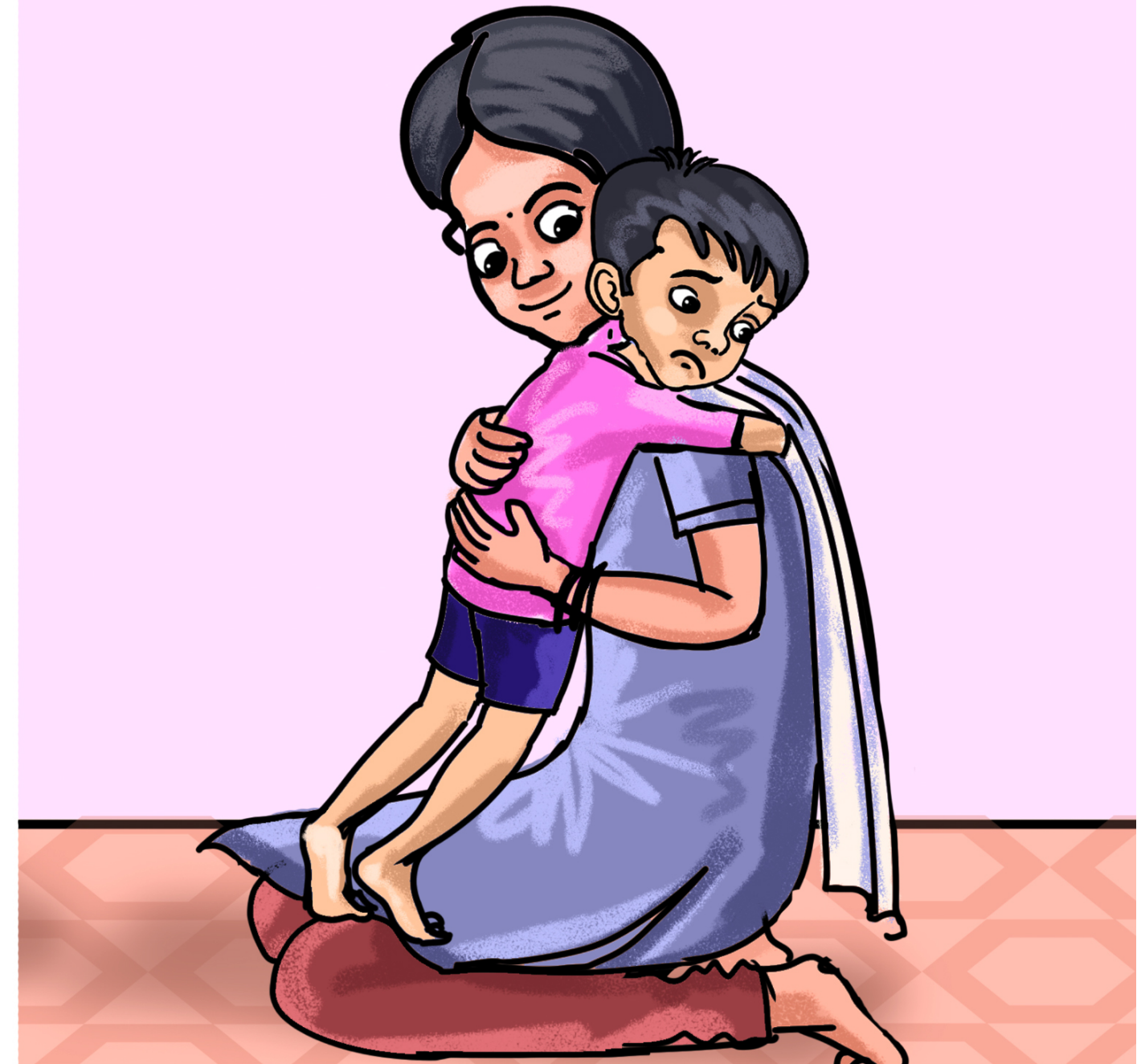
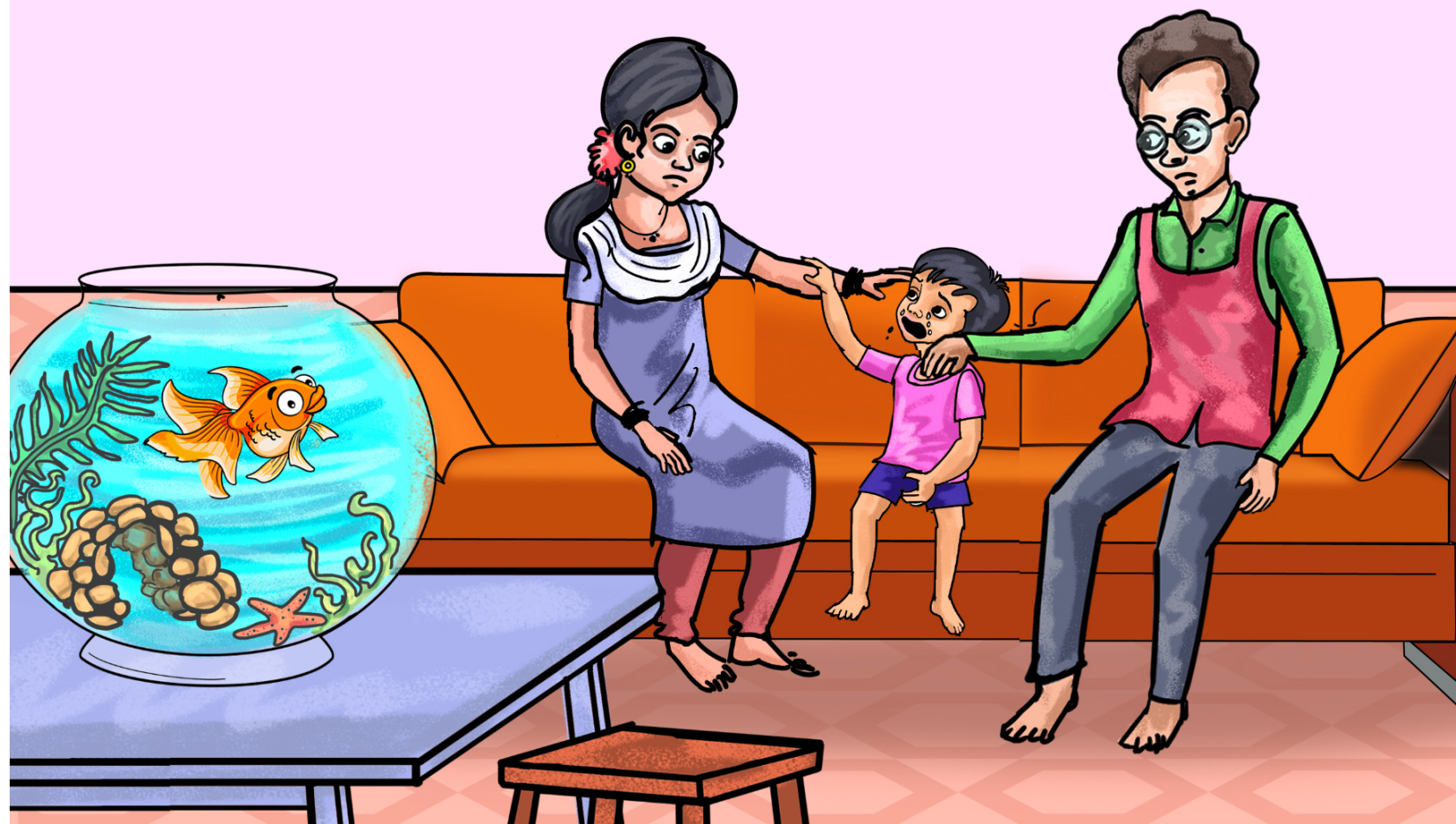
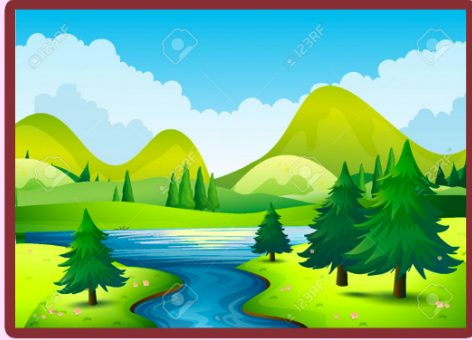
Tariq continued to feed Goldie but could not forget Spots.

"But why did Spots go away?" he cried.

"Spots was sick...and although the doctor tried his best, some sicknesses are hard to cure", said his father.

"Will Goldie also get sick now and die and leave me?" asked Tariq.

"No, not necessarily. Goldie is well and healthy, so she should survive," said his mother.

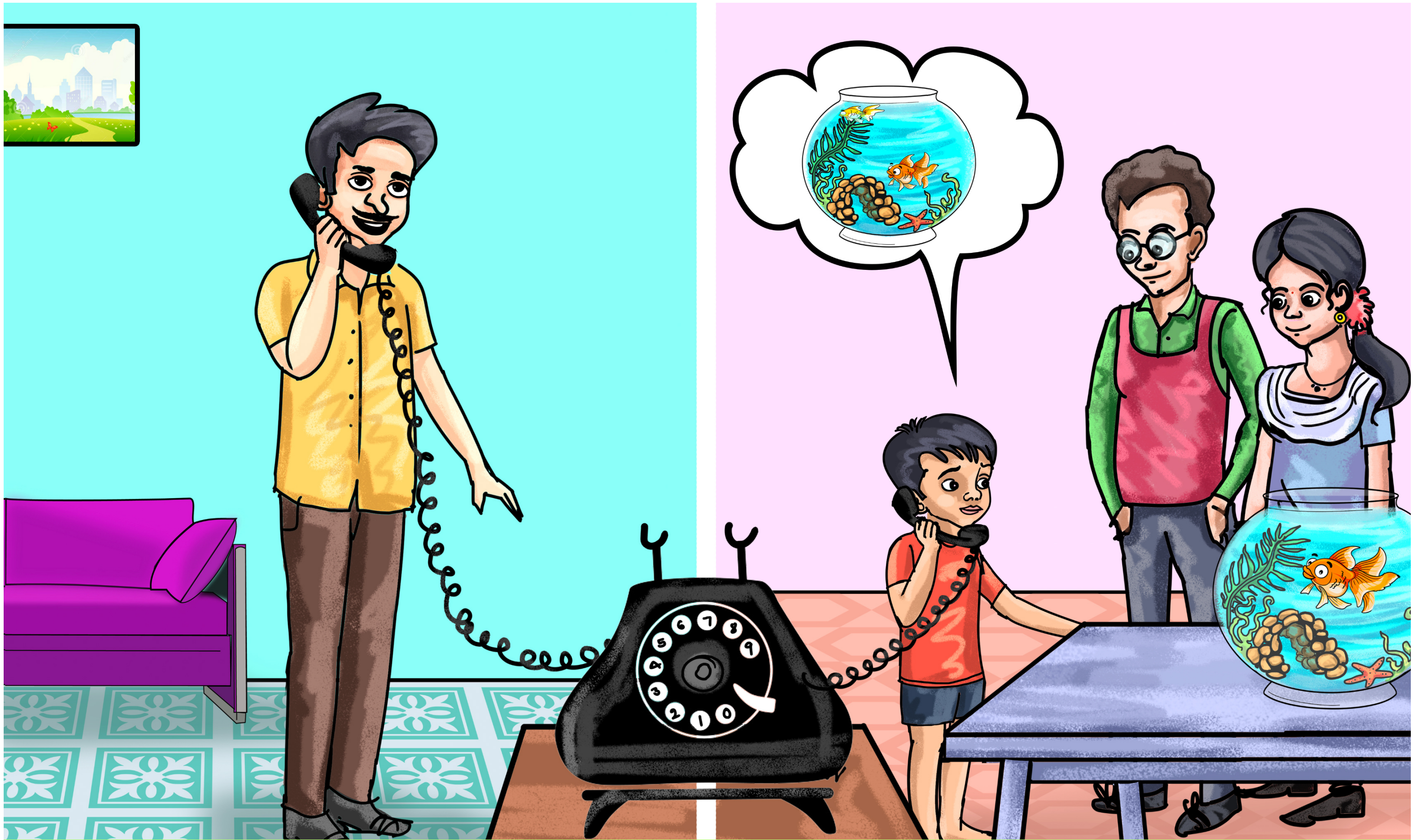


"Did it happen because I didn't take good enough care of Spots? May be it is my fault that he got sick" said Tariq, starting to cry again.

"Of course not, dearest", said his mother, hugging Tariq. "You took the best care possible of Spots. Remember how you have been feeding him, and cleaning his tank all these weeks. You never forgot your fish friends. And Spots knew how much you cared for him. It was not your fault that he got sick and died."

"Do you think Spots knew that?" asked Tariq worriedly.

"Yes, he did. He knew how much you cared about him", said his mother firmly. "It is not our fault when sad things like this happen. Animals and people get very sick sometimes and we don't always know why...even the doctors don't."



Some days later, when Uncle Ahmed called from abroad to ask how fish were, Tariq tearfully told him what had happened. "Never mind, my dear. Remember you still have Goldie— and I know that you really love and care of your fish friends. When I visit next month, we shall go and choose another fish companion for Goldie." So, over time, although Tariq still missed Spots and was sad sometimes, he continued to take good care of Goldie, as he eagerly awaited Uncle Ahmed's next visit.

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