

HOW COME "ANNAH" GETS TO DO THAT?



Written by Jessica Thyriar

Illustrated by Janine Carrington

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A BOOK BY A.N.B.U. (அன்பு)



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For my beloved Isaiah and Angelica, may you grow up in a world where your dreams are limitless and your potential unbound by gender. Believe in yourselves and in the power of your voices.

HOW COME ANNAH GETS TO DO THAT?

A book by A.N.B.U.

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

This story was created in response to the very real and ongoing issue of gender discrimination that many children experience, often without the language or confidence to express it. As parents, it's important for us to acknowledge that gender-based bias and unfair treatment do happen—even in places we expect to be safe, like family gatherings and in spaces we least expect it. By introducing these conversations early through stories like this, we help equip our children with the tools to recognize when something isn't right, to speak up, and to know they can always come to us without fear or shame. To support these conversations, we've included gentle reflection questions at the end of the story to help prompt dialogue and deeper understanding. These questions are designed to create space for open, age-appropriate discussion and to help your child feel seen, supported, and empowered to share their experiences and thoughts with you. Conversations around consent and bodily autonomy begin when we discuss and address issues that we silence because we don't want to make things awkward with those around us. By showing that we can speak up for our children and set the tone, we show them that they can trust and come forward with anything they experience. We want to create expressive and not dismissive conversations and safer spaces. The purpose of these discussions are to understand one another and create conversations where children can express themselves freely.

Flip to the back of the book for a few gentle reflection questions you can explore with the child before reading, and some simple ways to revisit the story's ideas together afterward.

Sahana and Eelavan were excited for the weekend—
they got to go to Appamma's house!

Appamma always gave them candy and let them
watch T.V. and they never got to do that at home!



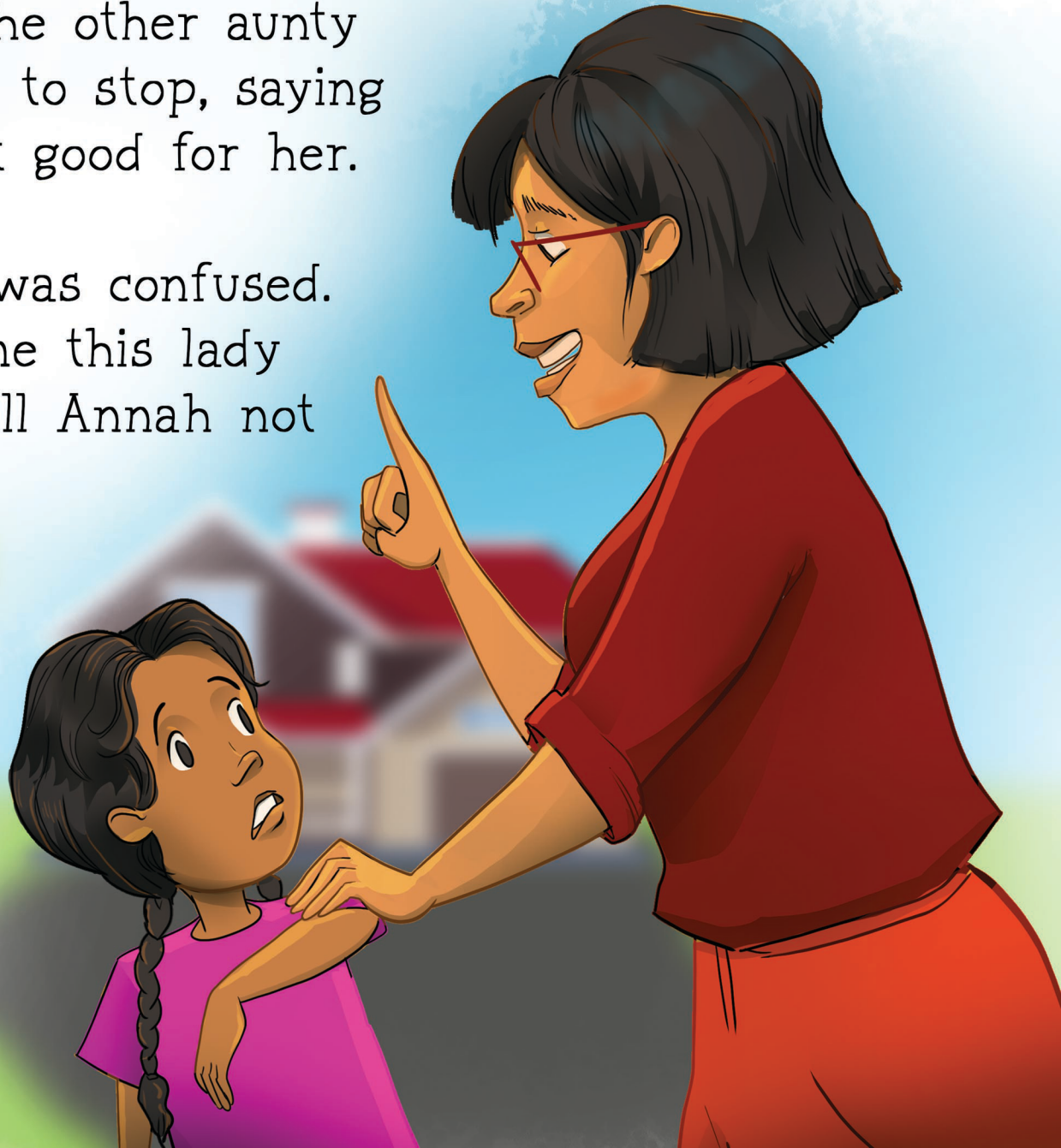


Sahana & Eelavan jumped out of the car, and ran towards the door.

Appamma had a friend over, which meant they might get double the treats!

When Sahana started running toward the house, the other aunty told her to stop, saying it wasn't good for her.

Sahana was confused. How come this lady didn't tell Annah not to run?

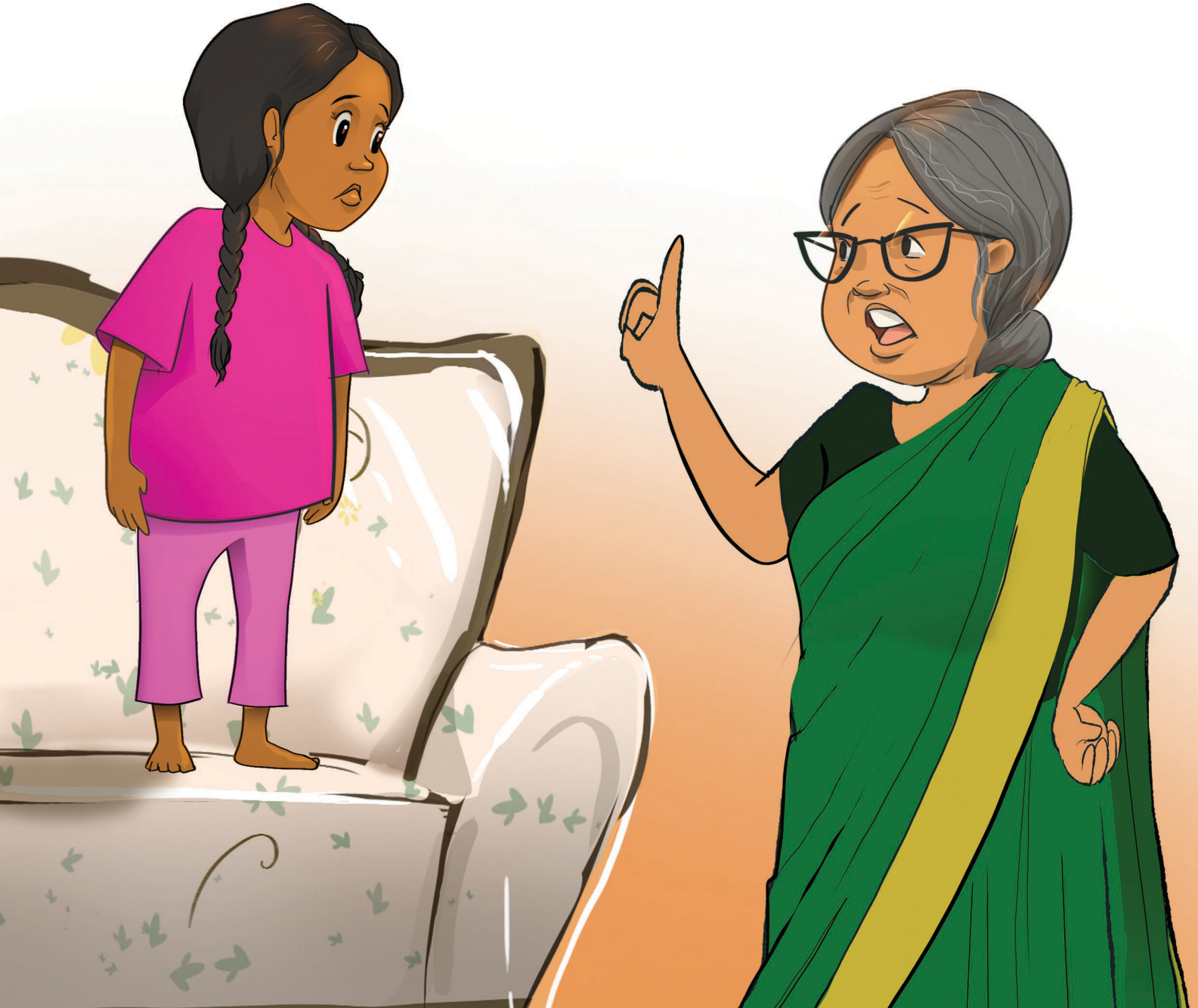



Once inside, Sahana waited to see if Annah would get in trouble too.

But Annah was still running and now he was jumping on the couch!



Sahana decided to join him, but that's when Appamma started shouting.
"No jumping or running, Sahana! You need to stop."



A digital illustration of a young girl with dark skin and long, dark hair styled in a braid. She is wearing a bright pink t-shirt and pink pants. She is sitting on a wooden floor in the corner of a room, with her back against the wall and her head bowed. Her expression is one of sadness or frustration. The room has light blue walls and a white baseboard. The floor is made of dark brown wood planks.

Sahana was mad. She
kept getting in trouble,
and Annah didn't.

Frustrated, she sat in
the corner.

Eelavan came over and asked her to play in the toy room. They started playing, but soon they were fighting over a toy. Appamma's friend walked in and told Sahana to give it to her Annah.

Sahana protested, "I had it first!" Eelavan knew this was true too.

The aunty replied, "Girls need to be calm, and since he's your Annah, you should just give it to him."

"No!" said Sahana.

And they started fighting even more.



But again, only Sahana got in trouble,
never Annah.

Sahana felt really sad. She didn't want
to come to Appamma's house anymore.
Annah got to do whatever he wanted,
while she kept getting scolded.



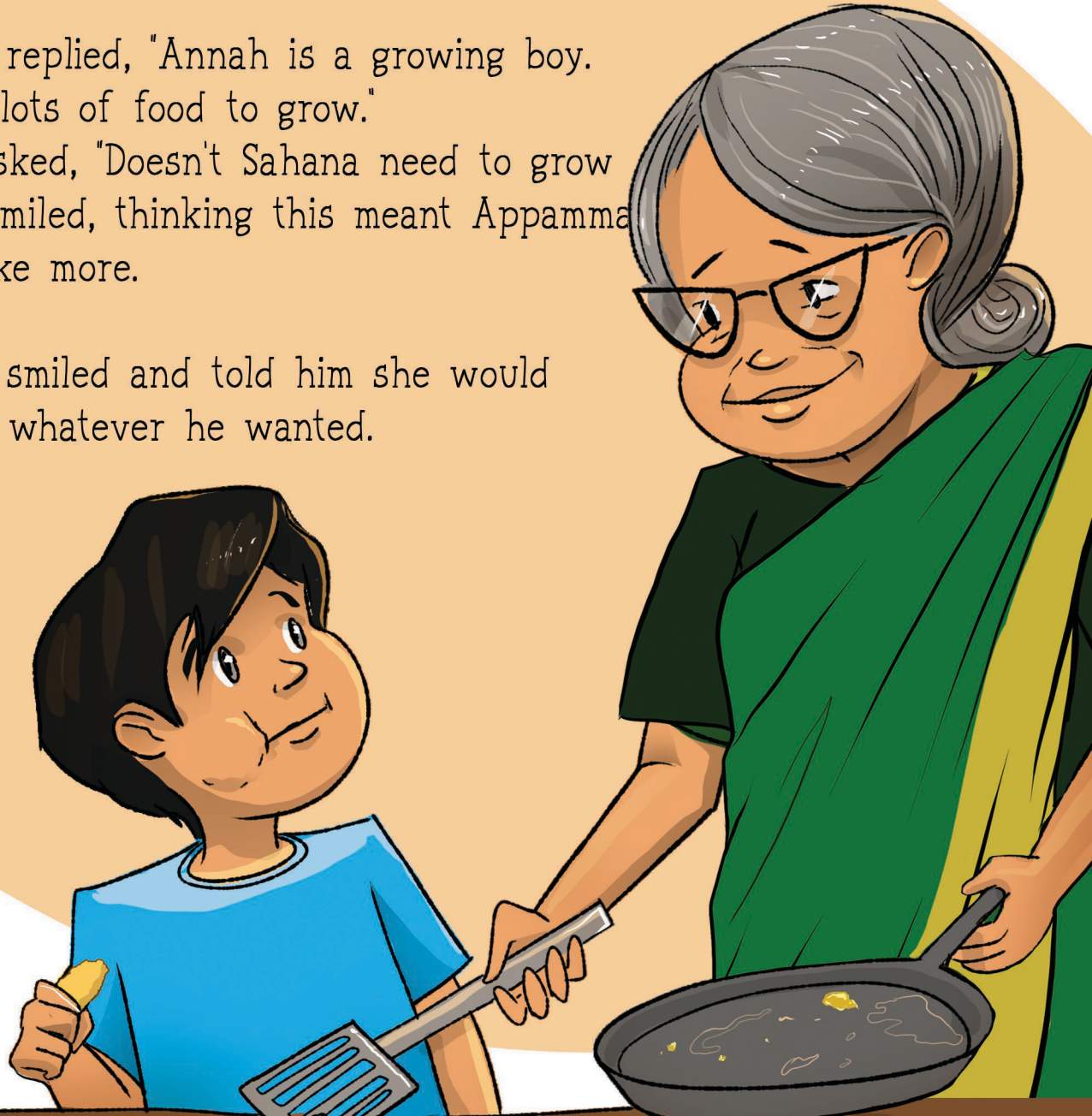


When it was time to eat,
Annah kept stealing
Sahana's banana fritters.
Appamma made the best
banana fritters in the
world, and now he was
taking hers!

'Appamma,' Sahana said,
'Annah keeps eating
mine, and soon there
won't be any left!'

Appamma replied, "Annah is a growing boy. He needs lots of food to grow."
Eelavan asked, "Doesn't Sahana need to grow too?" He smiled, thinking this meant Appamma would make more.

Appamma smiled and told him she would make him whatever he wanted.



When Amma arrived, she
saw Sahana sitting sadly
in the corner.

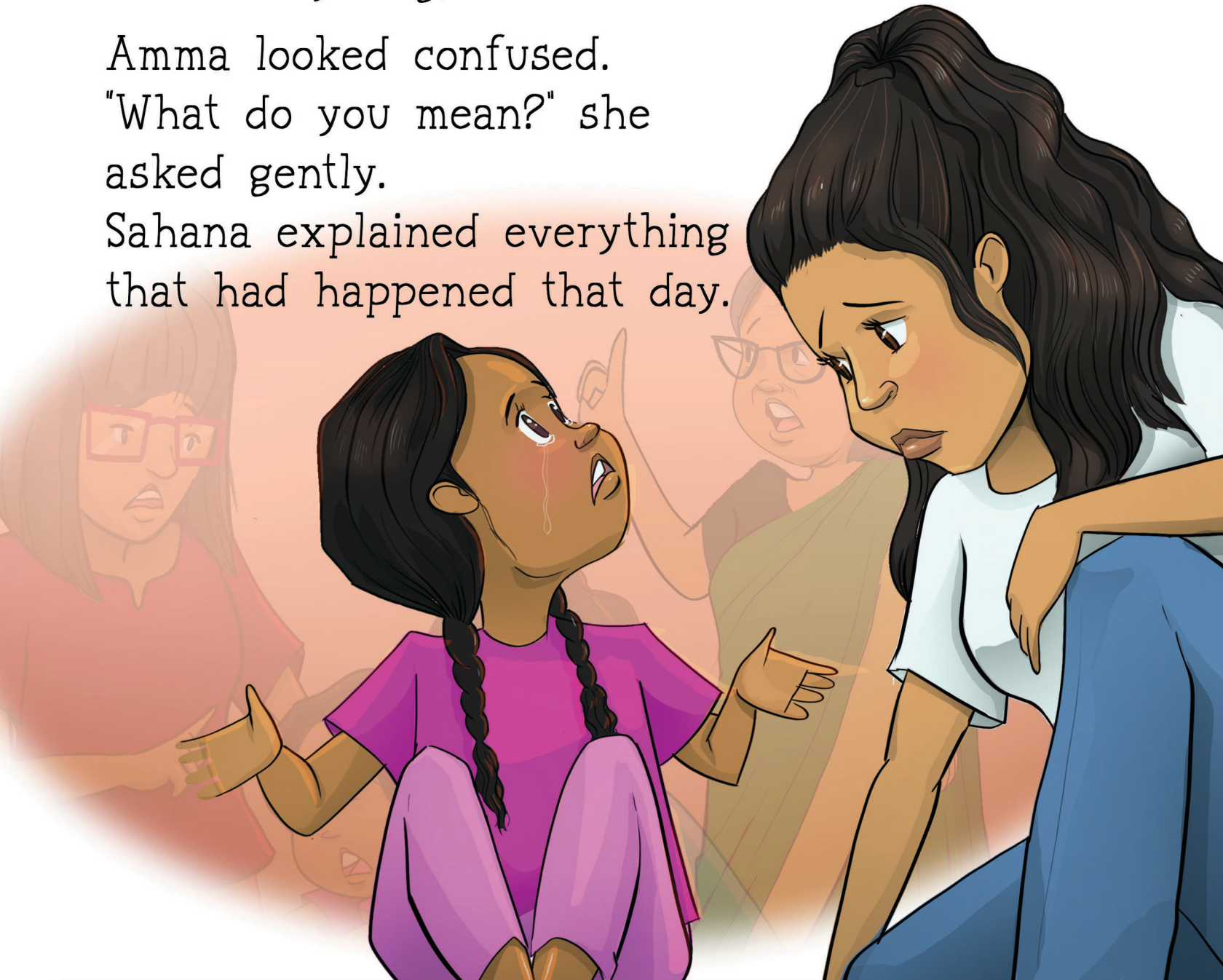


She asked what had happened, and Sahana started to cry. She said "How come Annah gets to do everything, and I don't?"

Amma looked confused.

"What do you mean?" she asked gently.

Sahana explained everything that had happened that day.



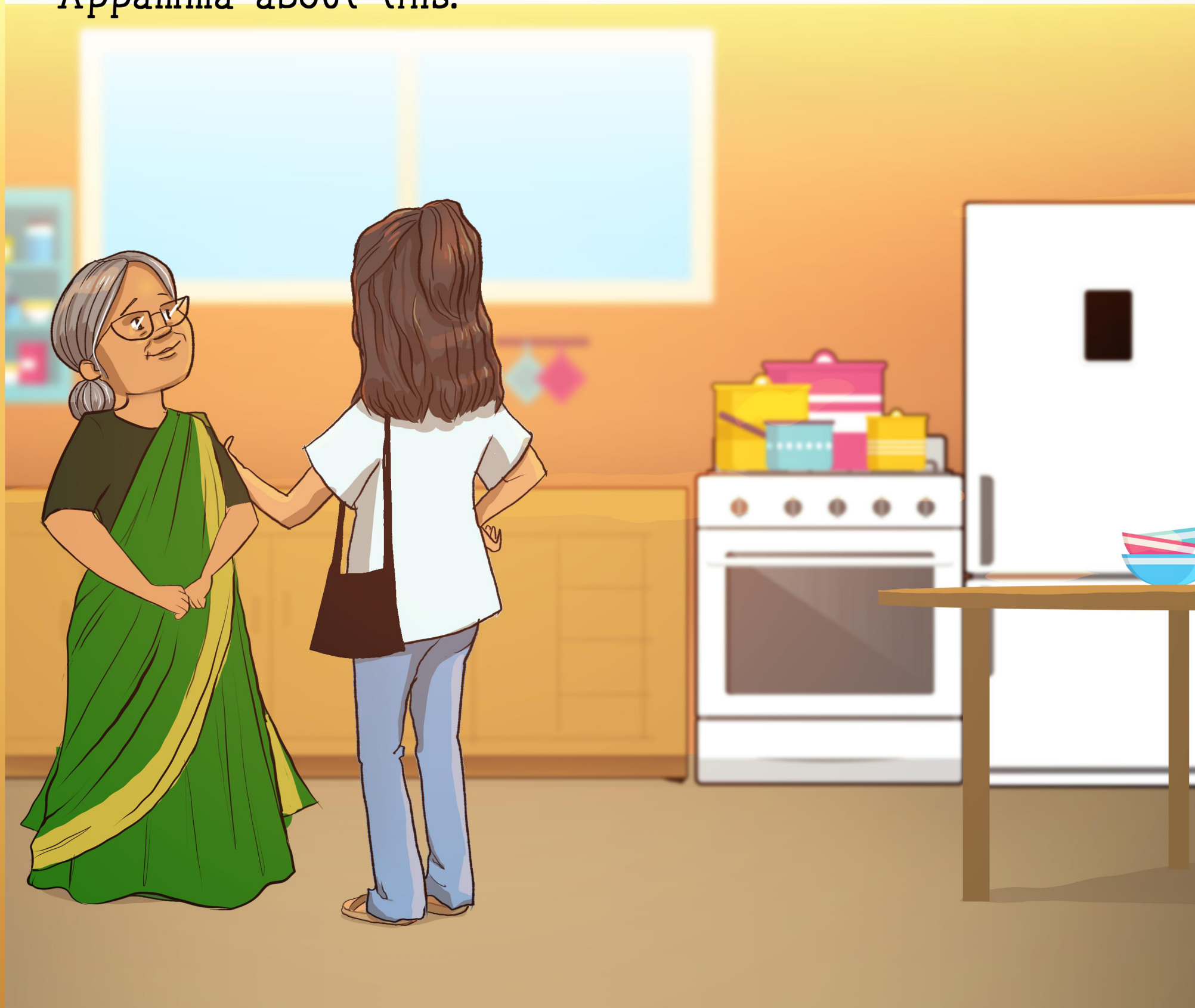
Amma listened carefully. Then she said, "Sahana, you and Eelavan shouldn't run or fight but sometimes the world may treat you differently. You have to remember that you are both capable and strong."

She looked at Sahana and said, "You are courageous and just as important as your brother. I'm sorry you were made to feel otherwise." Eelavan hugged Sahana. "Next time someone treats you differently, I'll tell them it's wrong," he said firmly.

Amma then turned to Eelavan and said, "Sometimes the world will tell you not to cry or that boys shouldn't act a certain way. But it's okay to express your emotions. Just focus on being kind."



Later that night Sahana and Eelavan heard Amma speak to Appamma about this.



Sahana felt happy her Amma took action. It meant she cared and Sahana was inspired to make change too.



PRE-STORY QUESTIONS (BEFORE READING)

1. Have you ever noticed someone being treated differently just because they're a boy or a girl?
2. Do you think boys and girls should be allowed to do the same things? Why or why not?
3. What would you do if you saw someone being told they can't do something because of their gender?
4. How does it feel when someone else gets to do something you're not allowed to?
5. Do you think rules should be the same for everyone at home or school? Why?

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POST-STORY QUESTIONS (AFTER READING)

1. How did it make you feel when the sister got in trouble but the brother didn't?
2. Was that fair? Why or why not?
3. What could the grown-ups in the story have done differently to make things more fair?
4. If you were the sister, what would you want to say to your parents or teacher?
5. If something like this happened to you or a friend, who would you talk to?

By having these discussions before and after reading the book, you are creating a safe and supportive environment where your child feels empowered to understand and stand up for their own needs and preferences while also knowing they can talk to you if they ever feel uncomfortable

ABOUT A.N.B.U.

Abuse Never Becomes Us (A.N.B.U.), is a Toronto-based charity. We were founded in 2016 with a vision for a future where Tamil people who have been impacted by childhood sexual abuse can find their voice. Our mission is to provide healing and empowerment through holistic support, resources, and advocacy on behalf of Tamil people who have been impacted by childhood sexual abuse. To learn more, visit www.anbu.ca or follow us on Instagram: @abuseneverbecomes

About the Author

Jessica Thyriar is a dedicated mother, passionate advocate against gender-based violence, and a proud Tamil woman. While I authored this book, it would not have reached its full potential without the invaluable contributions of my amazing colleagues at Abuse Never Becomes Us. Heartfelt thanks to Jenny, Tharsi, Shajini, Subani, Tharani, Abithiny and Swetha for believing in this vision and for their thoughtful edits that serve our community.

HOW COME "ANNAH" GETS TO DO THAT?

This book is a heartfelt tribute to all daughters who have grown up in Tamil households where the accomplishments or presence of sons often overshadowed their own. It is time to amplify your voices, embrace your stories, and celebrate your worth. May you feel seen, heard, and understood. Together, we can rewrite the narrative and empower future generations to break free from traditional confines. Let us ignite change, one story at a time, and foster a world that honours every individual, regardless of gender.



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