



Ruwayda Mustafah

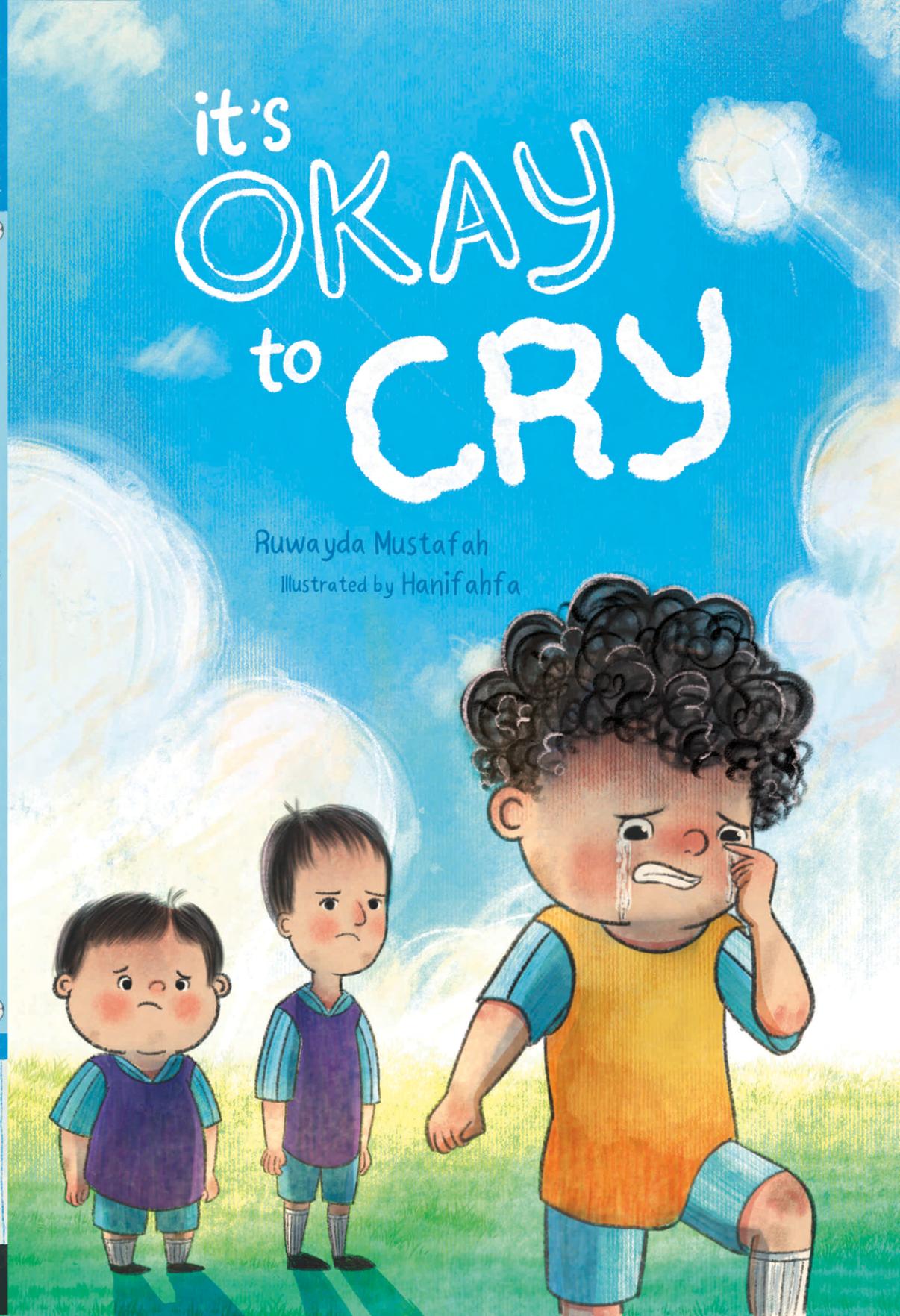


It's OKAY to CRY



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Ruwayda Mustafah
Illustrated by Hanifahfa



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In the ancient city of Erbil, there lived a little boy named Ari who absolutely loved playing football.

Every day, on his way to school, he would kick a ball around with pure joy.



“Left foot, right foot, and here comes the striker! And it's a win! Ariiiii Sarbaz scores!” he would cheerfully pretend to be on the pitch.



Ari's favorite day of the week was Tuesday because that is when their sports lesson would begin at 9:00 sharp, and he would get to play football with his classmates.

With a big grin on his face, Ari entered the classroom and winked at his best friends, Meer and Aland.



Meer loved football like Ari, but he was more into playing with Pokemon cards; if allowed, he would convince the world that it was a sport.



Aland loved playing football with his friends too, but he had a funny bone — he could make anyone laugh at any given time.



Every morning, all three would sit behind the desk, trading Pokemon cards, awaiting their teacher.



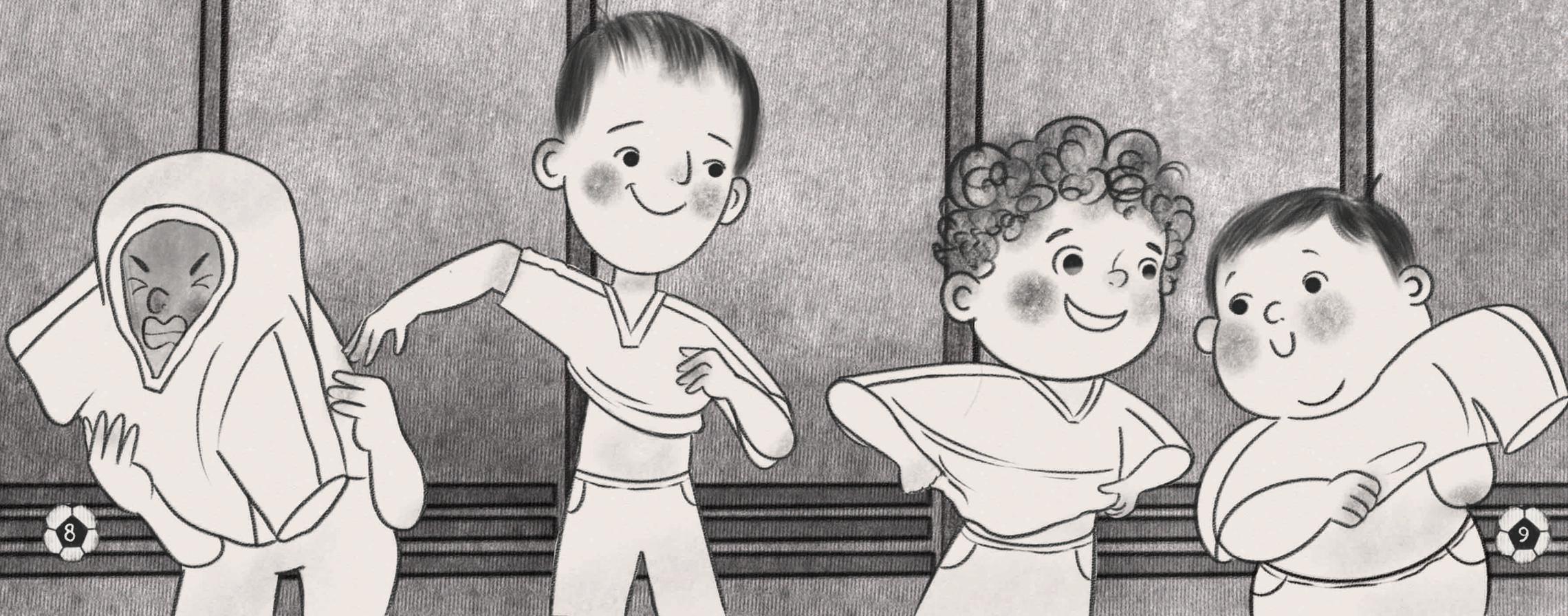
Their teacher would start the day by taking the register and then instructed them to head to the school gym and get changed for their sports class.

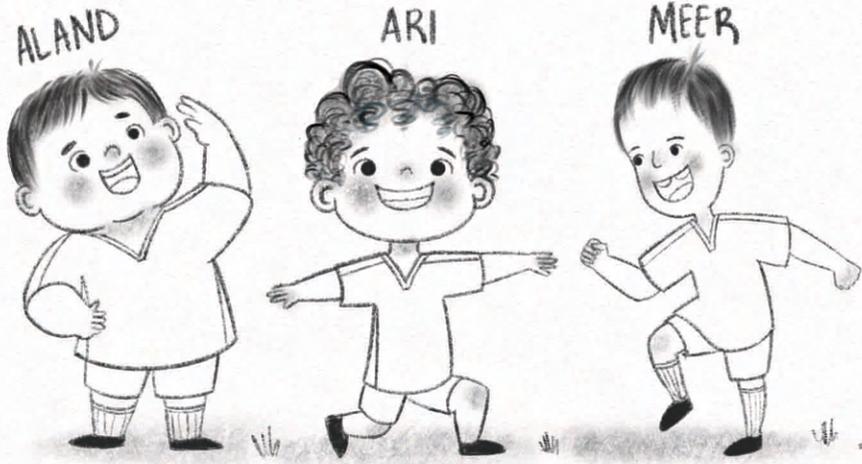


Ari, Meer, and Aland dashed through the school hallway, eager to be the first ones to get changed in the locker room. They were excited.



They talked and laughed while putting on their sports gear. "We're going to crush it," Aland smirked, brimming with confidence.





When they reached the school pitch, the boys lined up with their classmates. Their sports teacher, Mr. Shaho, divided them into two groups.

Ari found himself in the orange group, while Meer and Aland were placed in the purple group.



ORANGE GROUP



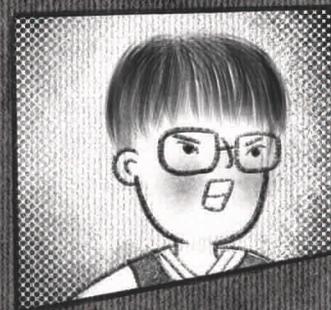
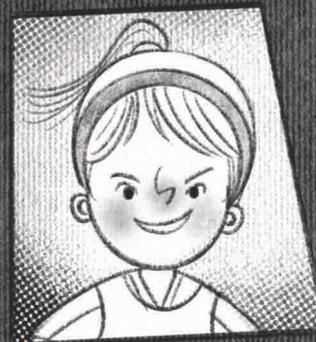
PURPLE GROUP



The teams raced across the field, back and forth, each striving to score a goal. Ari's teammate, Hannah, skillfully passed the ball to him.



Ari sprinted ahead,



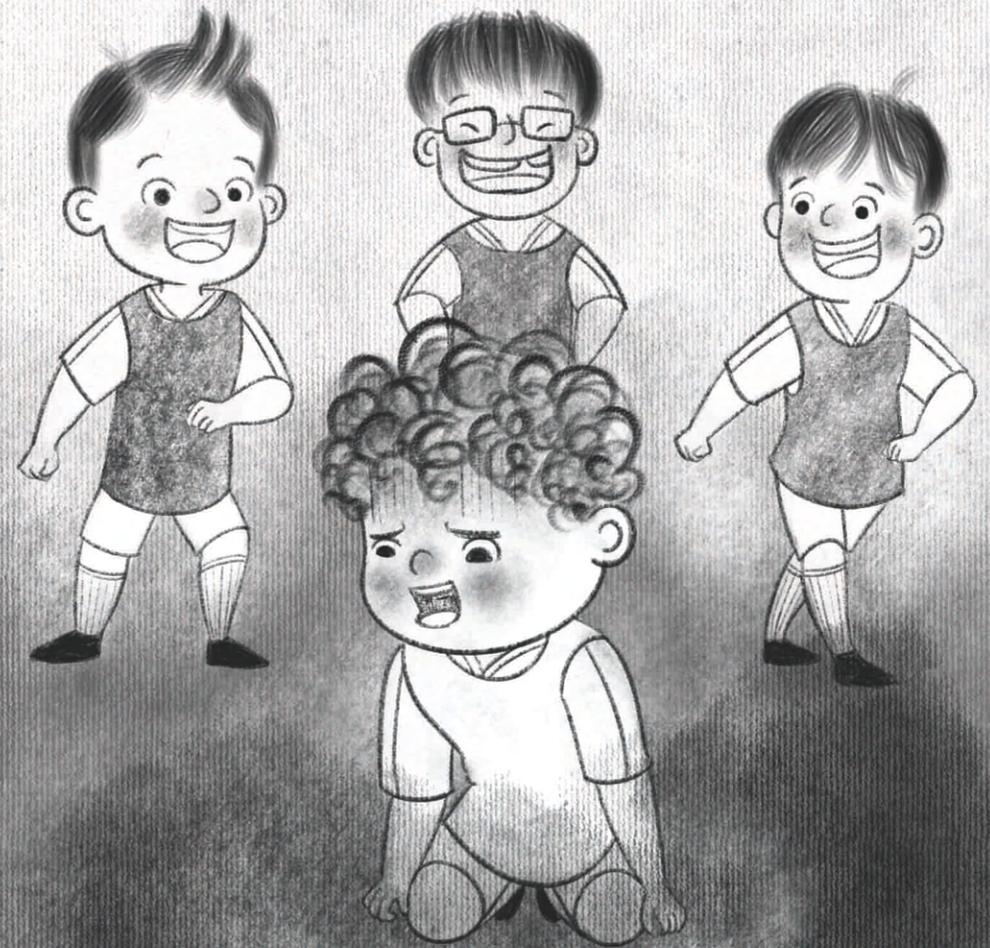
ready to score,

but to his dismay...

He missed the goal and hit the fence instead.



The purple team burst into laughter,
mocking Ari's misfortune.



But Hannah and Ali hurriedly approached Ari, trying to lift his spirits.



"Let's go again, Ari! We can do this!" they encouraged him.



Meanwhile, Meer and Aland gained control of the ball, displaying their fancy footwork as they weaved past Hannah and Ali on the field.



Meer and Aland managed to score a goal, leaving the purple team victorious.



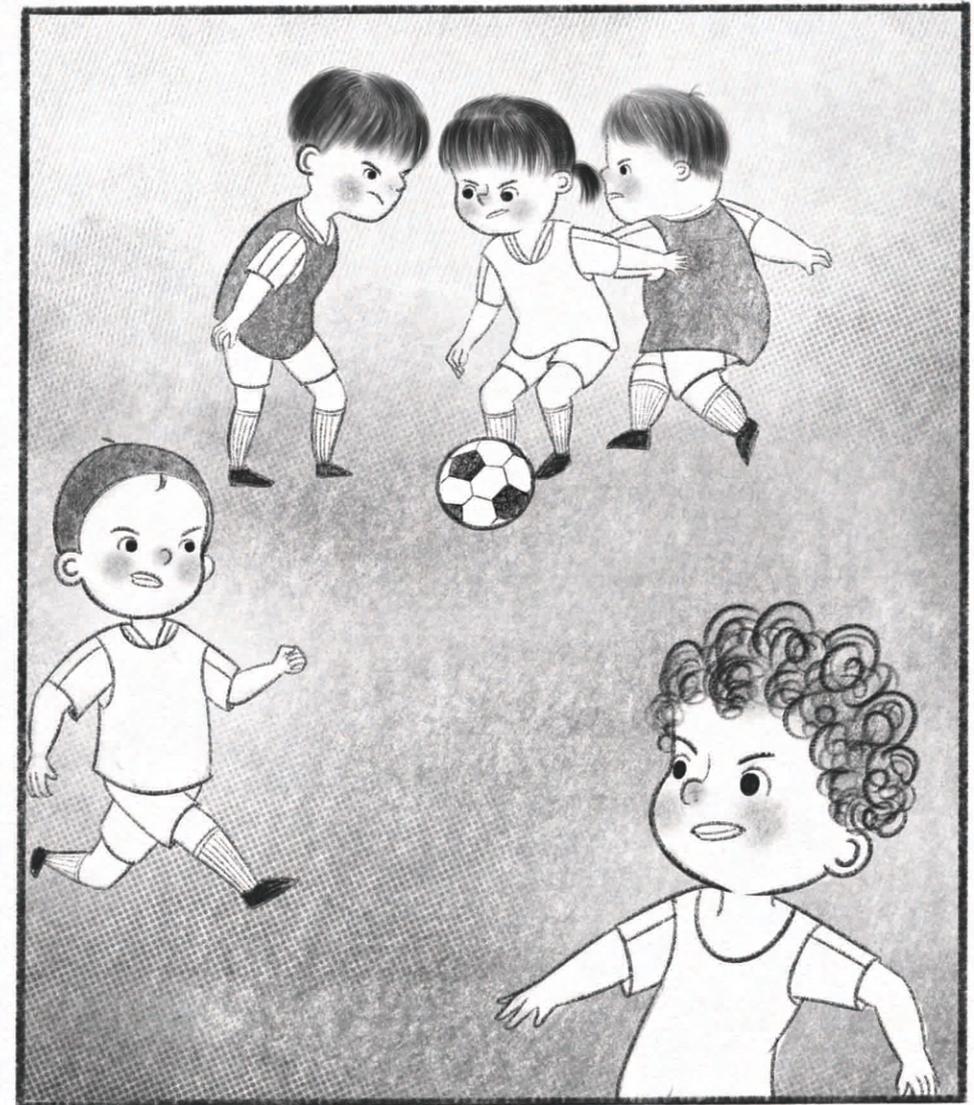
GOOOOAAAALLL



The purple team celebrated, basking in their one-goal lead, while their teammates cheered them on.

During the break, the orange team regrouped. "We need a new strategy," Ali suggested.

San, the goalkeeper, nodded in agreement. Among themselves, they decided to give Ari, their star striker, an advantage by passing the ball to him whenever possible.

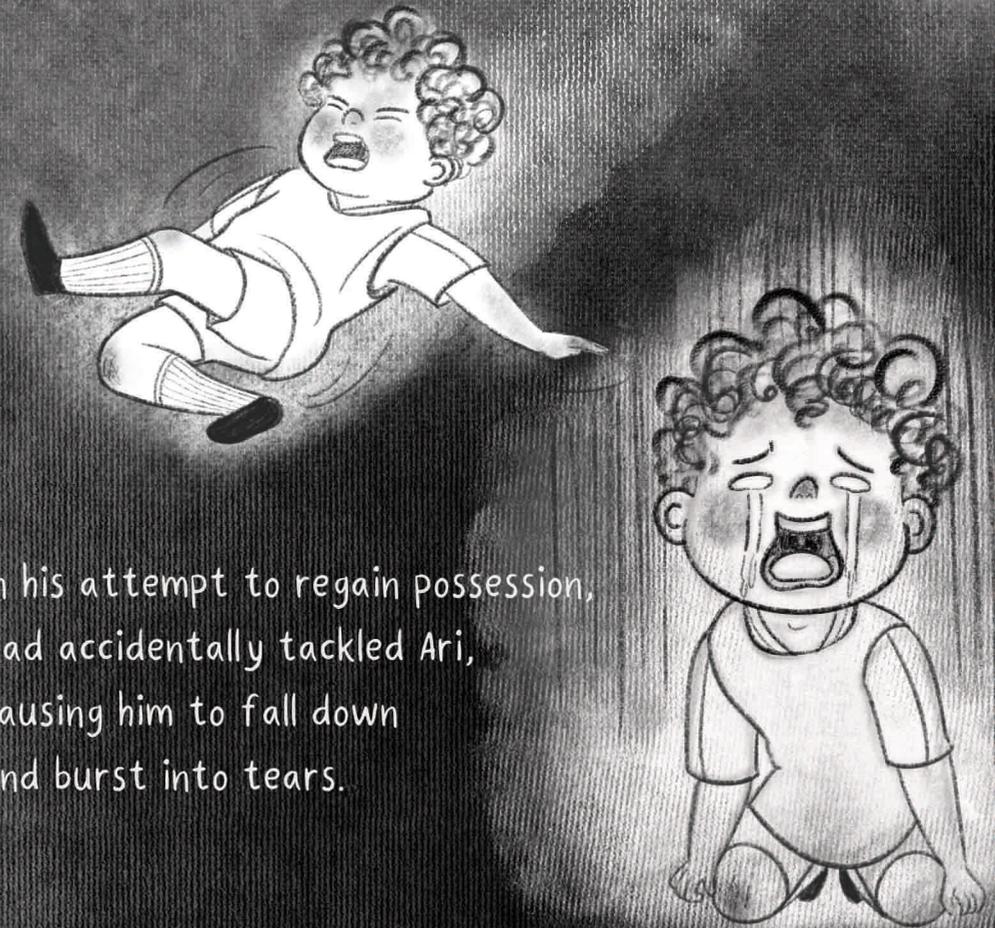
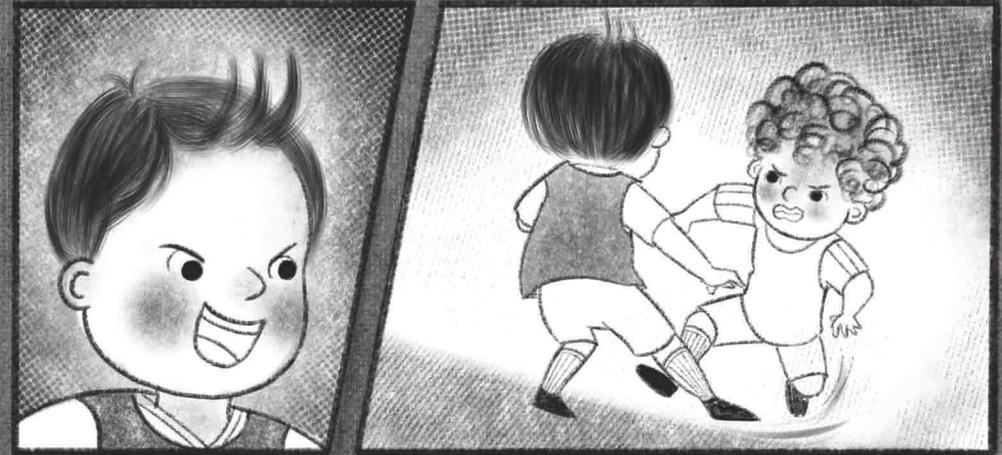


Back on the field, Hannah, Sara, and Ali positioned themselves in midfield. Ari and Ali took on the role of strikers, while San guarded the goal.

On the other end, the purple team assigned Meer and Aland to defense, with Yad and Baz leading the attack and Naz as the goalkeeper. The whistle blew, signaling the start of the game with the ball in the orange team's possession.



Yad and Baz skillfully maneuvered the ball, inching closer to scoring a goal. However, Sara stepped in, intercepting their play and passed the ball to Ali, who quickly relayed it to Ari.



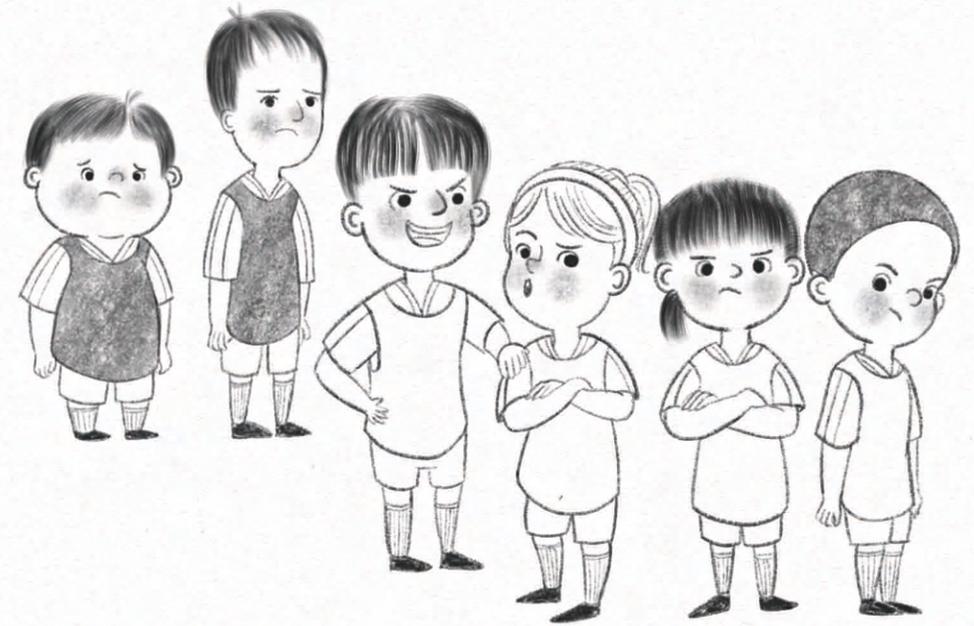
In his attempt to regain possession, Yad accidentally tackled Ari, causing him to fall down and burst into tears.



Ari's classmates gathered around him, witnessing his tear-streaked face and a small cut on his knee.



Some of them laughed, saying, "Hey, don't cry! Boys are strong and don't cry. Ayba! Hasta!"



Ari wiped his tears, his face flushed with embarrassment. The game came to an end by then, leaving Ari feeling upset and disheartened.



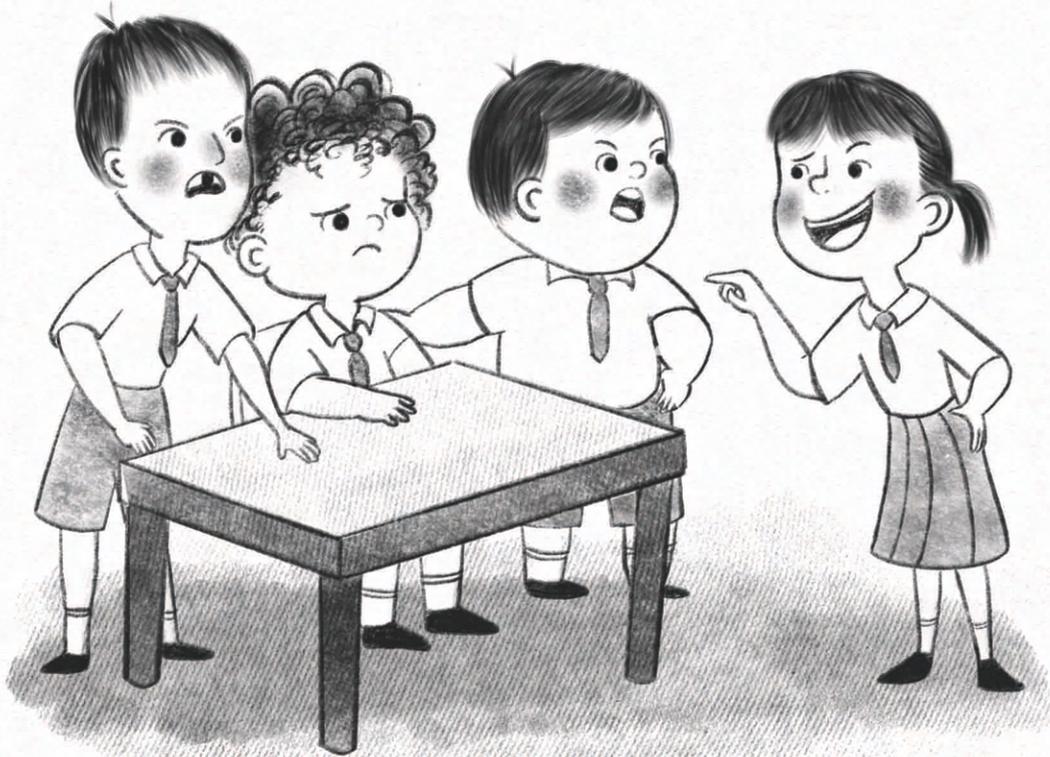
In the locker room, Ari changed quietly while Meer and Aland looked at him sympathetically.

Concerned, they asked if he was okay, and Ari responded with a forced smile, assuring them that he was fine.

As they returned to class, Ari's cheeks were still blushed, carrying the lingering embarrassment from his crying incident on the pitch.



Sara glanced at Ari and teasingly remarked, "Waaa waaa waaa.. you look like you're about to cry." She burst into laughter, thinking it was all in good fun.

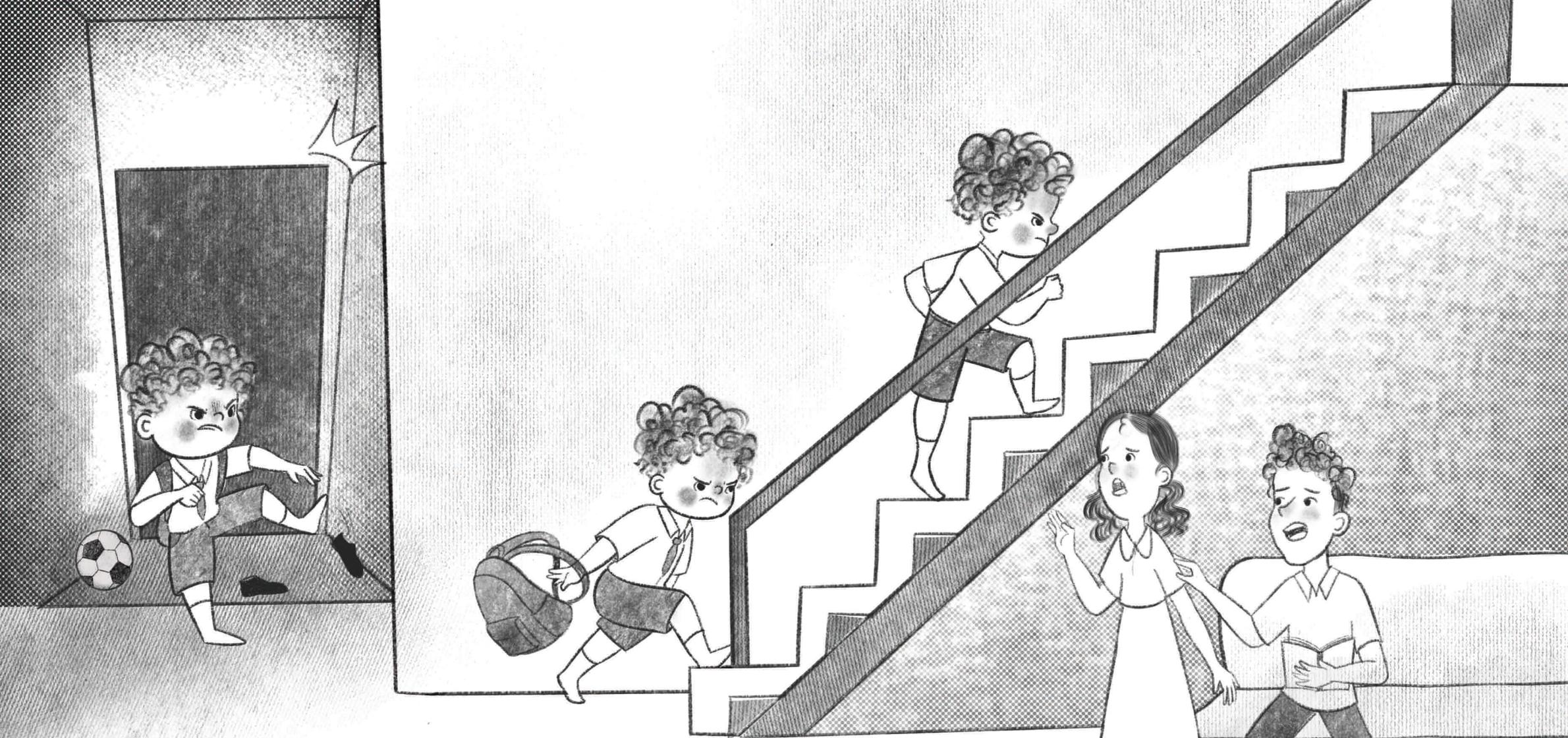


Aland stepped in, defending Ari. "That's not a kind thing to say, Sara," he said firmly, not tolerating her insensitive comment. She replied, "I was just trying to lift his mood."

On their way home, Aland, Meer, and Ari usually walked together, cracking jokes and having a good time.

However, today Ari wasn't in a joking mood. Despite this, his friends didn't want to leave him alone, so they walked with him home in silence, assuring him of their support.





Upon reaching home, Ari tossed his backpack on the floor and kicked off his shoes by the door. He ran upstairs to his room and shut the door behind him.

"Oh dear, it looks like someone had a tough day," Ari's mother said, noticing his gloomy expression.

Ari's dad glanced up from the newspaper he was reading and said, "He'll be fine."



"You should probably go talk to him..." Ari's mom suggested to his dad.

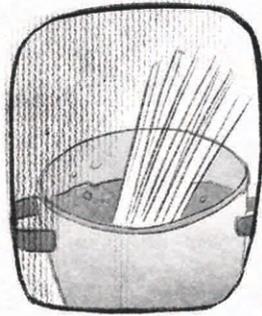
Ari's dad went upstairs and gently knocked on his door. "Hey, champ, do you want to go get some sharbati hanar from the bazaar?"



Ari covered his head with a pillow upon hearing his dad's voice.

Ari's parents patiently waited outside his room, understanding that he needed some time.





Ari's dad decided to do something he knew Ari would love. He started boiling some spaghetti, thinking it might help brighten his mood.

"I know what will do the trick," he said with a smile.

Ari's dad cooked up Ari's favorite spaghetti Bolognese, sprinkled with a generous amount of parmesan cheese on top.

The aroma of the spaghetti wafted into Ari's room, and despite still feeling upset, he couldn't resist the delicious smell.





Reluctantly, Ari made his way downstairs, sat at the kitchen table, and began eating the comforting meal his dad had prepared.



Mum and dad also sat at the table, eating their own servings, patiently waiting for Ari to open up.

Between bites, Ari's dad finally broke the silence, asking gently, "How was your day, champ?"

The room remained quiet, with Ari lost in his thoughts.

Ari's mom spoke softly, trying to ease the tension. "It's okay, Ari. Whenever you're ready, you can tell us."



Suddenly, Ari's emotions overwhelmed him, and he cried out, "THEY LAUGHED AT ME FOR CRYING!"

Ari's mom immediately rushed over and embraced him tightly, offering him comfort and support. Meanwhile, his dad added another helping of spaghetti to his plate, hoping it would provide some solace.



"You know," Ari's dad began, "when I was your age, I once fell off my bike and cried for days on end."

Ari's mom joined in, sharing her own moments of crying as a child. "And in school, someone pulled my chair, and I fell flat on the floor. Everyone laughed at me!" It was not a kind thing to do.

Ari's parents continued recounting all the times they had been laughed at or felt embarrassed.



"You see, Ari," his mom explained, "it's okay to cry, whether you're a boy or a girl. It's a part of being human. If you weren't able to cry, you'd be a robot."

Ari felt reassured by his parents' understanding and acceptance. Being laughed at didn't bother him as much anymore.

The next day, Ari woke up with the incident almost forgotten. He realized that his true friends, Meer and Aland, were there for him, and he embraced the day with newfound confidence and a smile on his face.

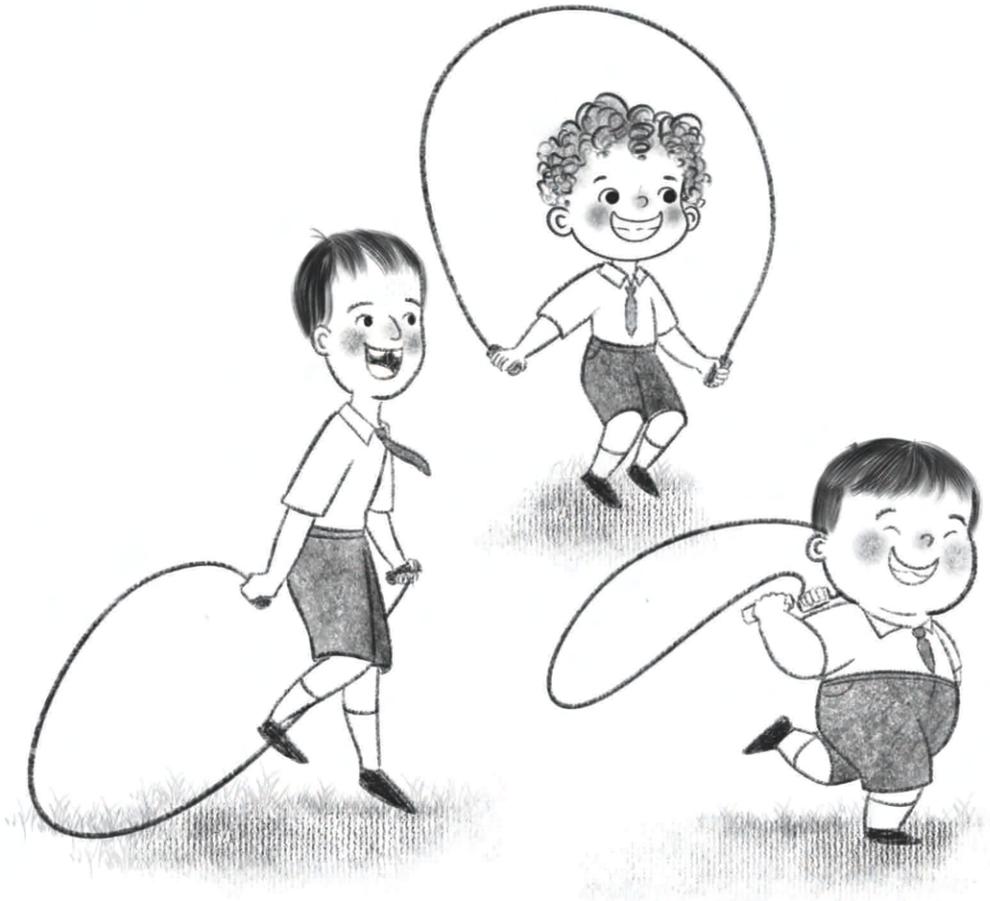


When he entered his classroom, he felt a slight hesitation, but he didn't let it hinder his spirits.



He walked in, took his seat at the desk, and exchanged playful greetings with his mates, Aland and Meer. They shared a knowing glance that said, "We've got each other's backs."

After math class, they had a delightful 30-minute break in the playground. Aland and Meer suggested they play skipping hop, a game that always brought joy to their hearts.



Ari loved the idea, and as they began hopping, a sight caught his attention. He saw a little boy in year 3, wiping his tears away, seemingly alone and in need of comfort.

Ari couldn't ignore the boy's distress. He approached him with empathy, putting his arm around his shoulder.

Ari understood how important it was to hear those words, as both boys and girls have emotions, and it is okay to express them.

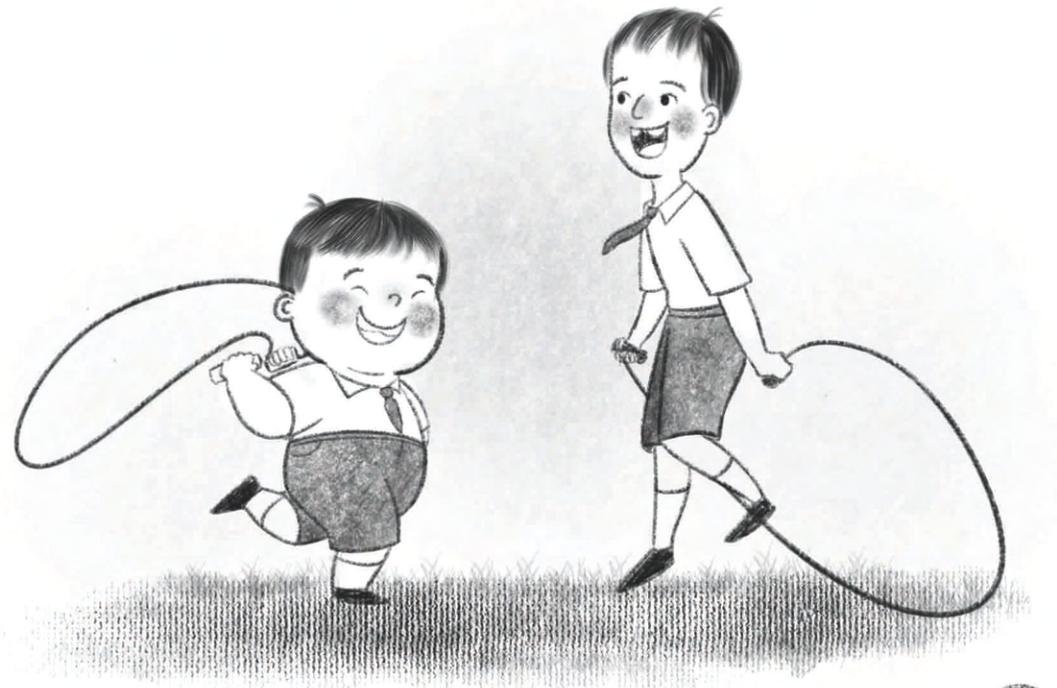
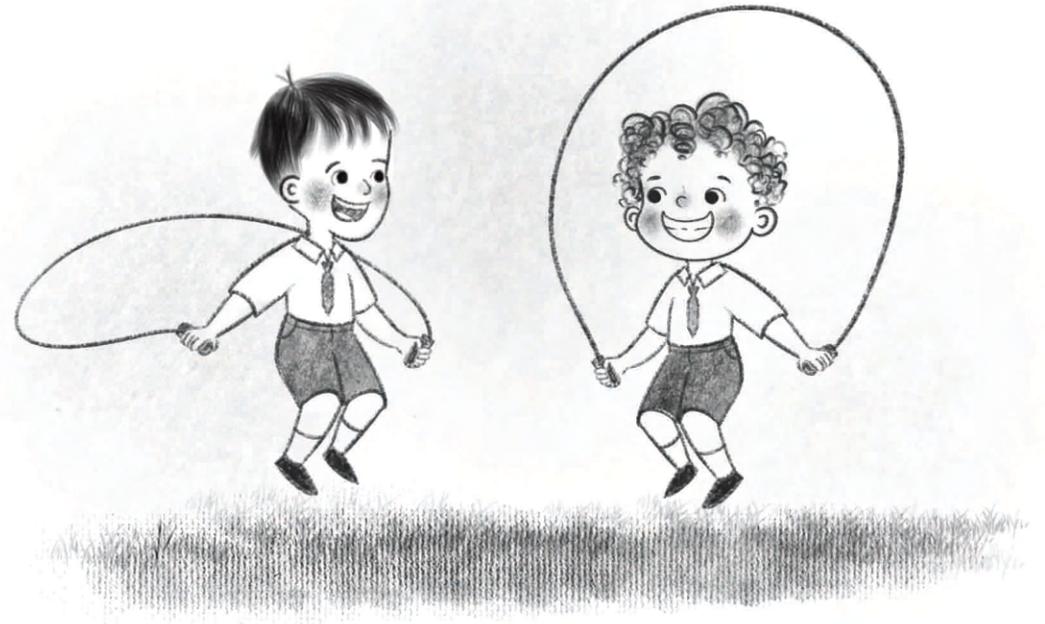


"Hey, it's going to be okay,"



Although he was hesitant at first, but Ari took a deep breath and said, "I had a sad day yesterday. I was playing football and cried. Some people laughed at me. But it's okay to be sad sometimes, and to cry."

Aland and Meer, following Ari's lead, joined him in cheering up the boy, who introduced himself as Agrin. They invited Agrin to join their game of skipping hop, creating a space where he felt included and valued.



And from that day onwards, Ari always kept an eye out for other students in the playground.



He understood the importance of looking after friends and those in the community,

Knowing that small acts of kindness could make a big difference in someone's day.



As the days went by, Ari, Meer, Aland, and Agrin became a close group of friends. They laughed, played, and supported each other through both triumphs and challenges.

And so, the story of Ari and his friends became a testament to the power of friendship, empathy, and the courage to be oneself. They showed that boys could cry, laugh, and support one another, and this shows strength, not weakness.



THE END