

The Boy with a Brave

Smile





This book belongs to

.....



What are cleft lips and palates?

Some babies are born with a cleft—a gap in their lip and/or the roof of their mouth (palate). In India, 35,000+ children are born with a cleft every year.

How do clefts affect children?

Without treatment, children with clefts may have problems in eating, breathing, speaking, and hearing. Sometimes other children tease them, and they often live in isolation.

Can it be treated?

Yes! With surgery and associated care, clefts can be treated and children can live healthy and full lives.

For free cleft treatment, please call:
1800 103 8301



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THUD! THUD! THUD!

Piya's heart thumped loudly as she stepped into the classroom.

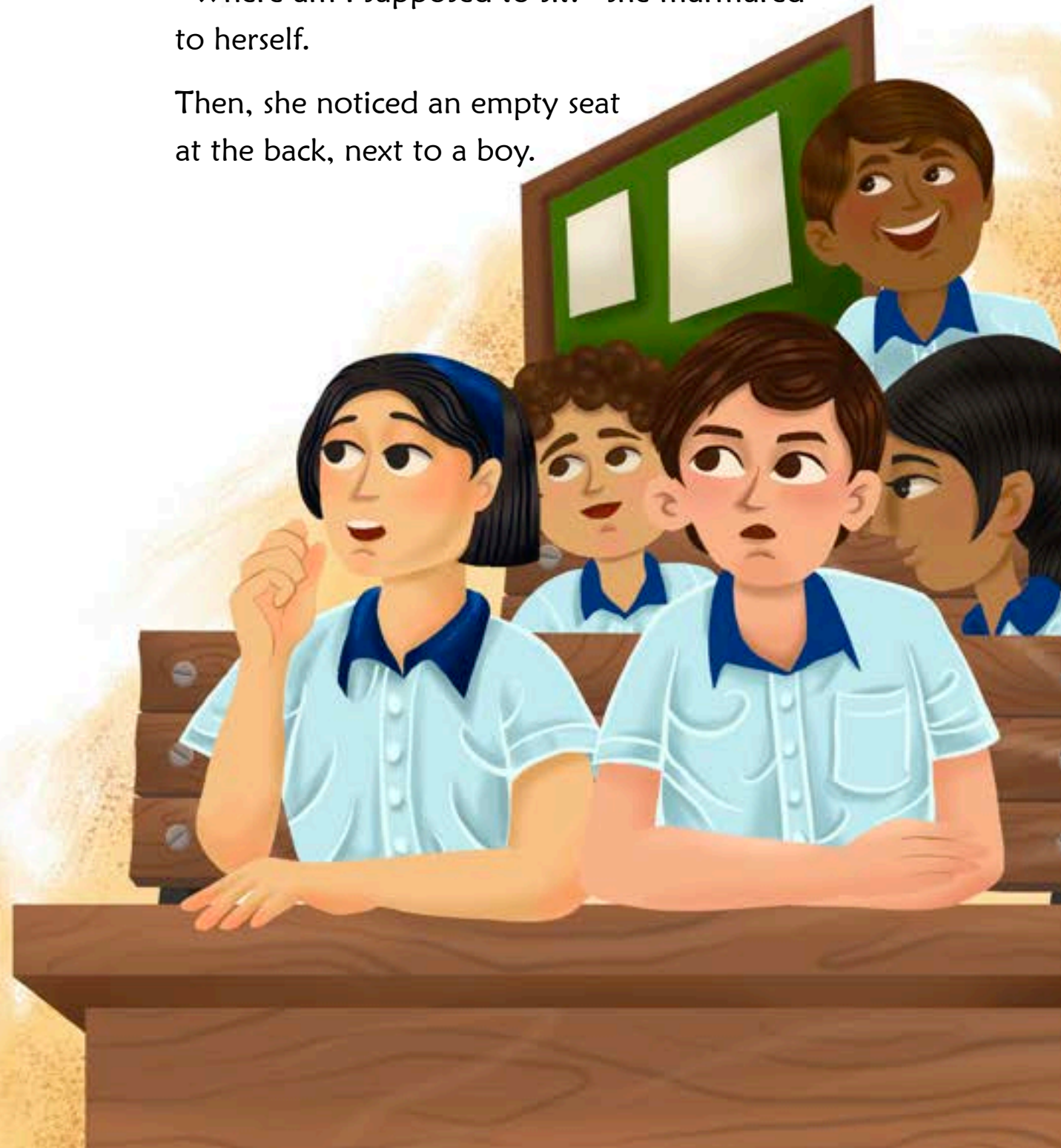
It was her first day at the new school. She missed her old classroom, her familiar desk and, most of all, her friends.



Piya scanned the
classroom for a seat.
Every desk was filled.

“Where am I supposed to sit?” she murmured
to herself.

Then, she noticed an empty seat
at the back, next to a boy.



Piya took a deep breath and walked over.

She wondered if the boy ever felt like her—nervous and out of place.

As she got closer, she saw he was drawing something. He looked up briefly, then returned to his drawing.



As Piya sat down, whispers broke out.

“Harelipped Harsh with a broken grin, a smile contest he can never win!” a boy teased.

“But look who’s sitting by him now—they make a perfect pair somehow!” added a girl.



Piya noticed a big scar along the boy’s lip that looked like a winding river.



The boy hunched lower over his notebook.

“What happened to your lip?” Piya whispered.

The boy paused, tracing the edge of his notebook.

“It’s a l-o-n-g story,” he said, “that started with a hungry tiger . . .”



Piya's eyes widened. "A tiger?"

"Not just any tiger," the boy said,
"a Bengal tiger!"

"Is that how you got the scar?" Piya asked.

The boy shook his head. "No!"

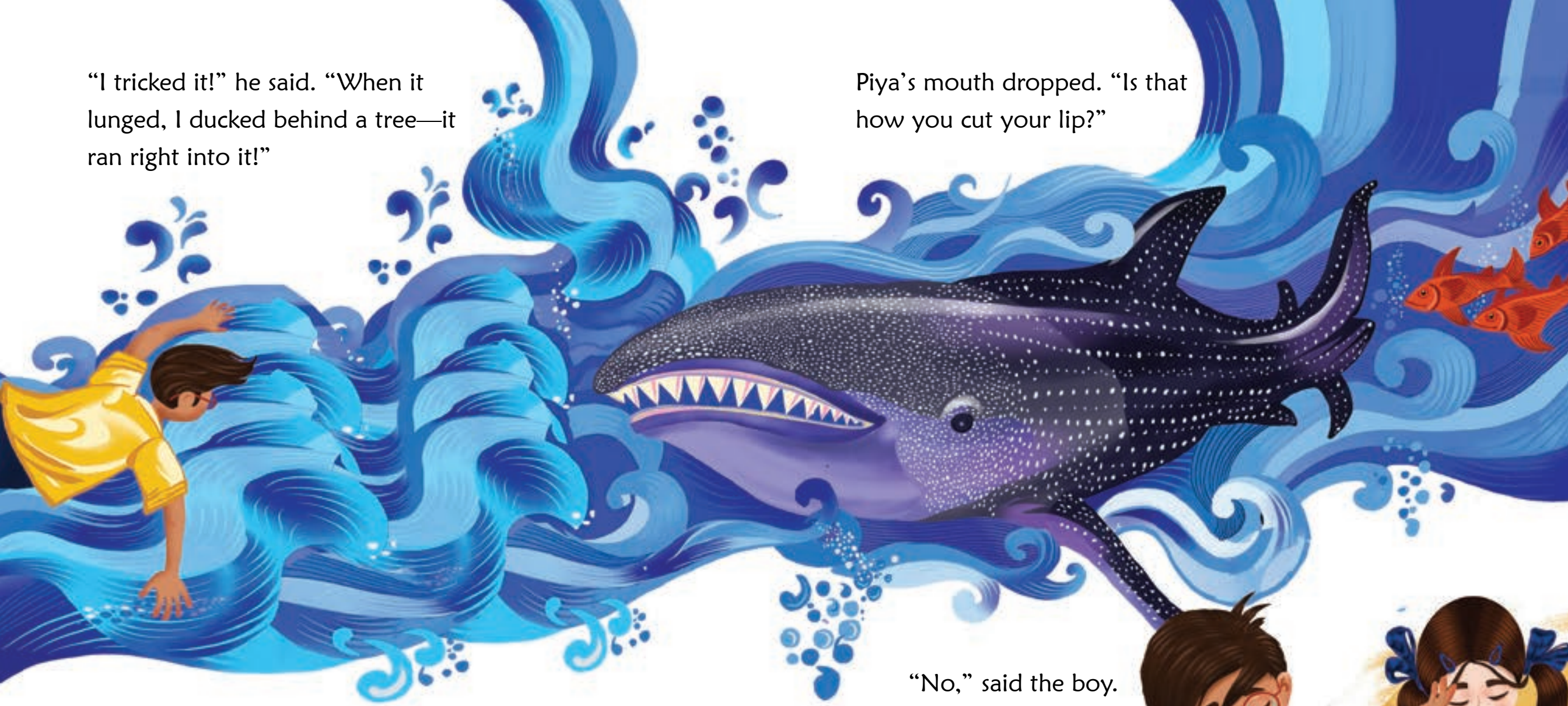
"I was visiting my Dada-Dadi in the Sundarbans," he continued. "One day, I walked into the jungle and—ROAR! A tiger leaped out and bared its claws . . ."

Piya's curiosity was sparked.
"Then what happened?"



“I tricked it!” he said. “When it lunged, I ducked behind a tree—it ran right into it!”

Piya’s mouth dropped. “Is that how you cut your lip?”



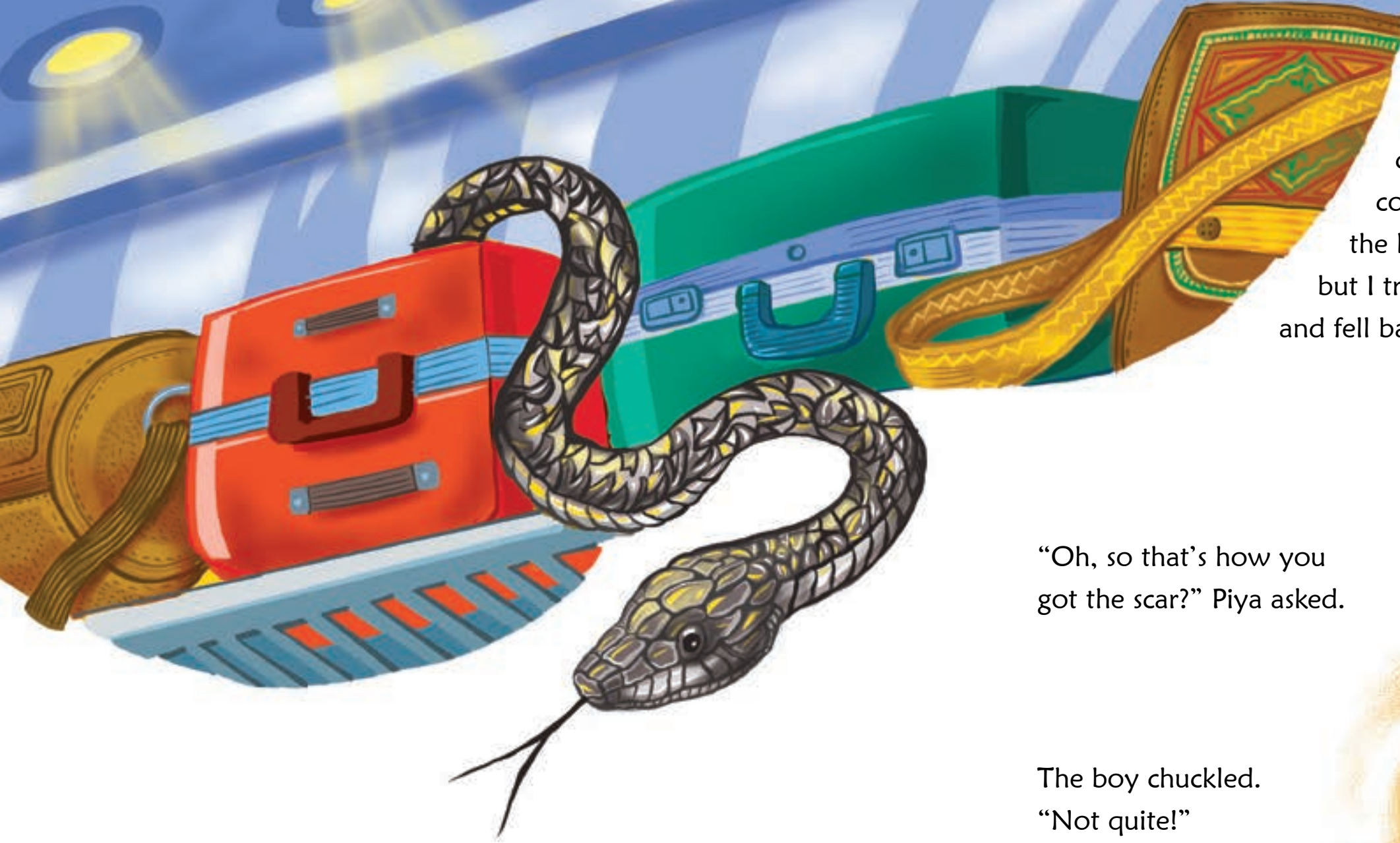
Piya blinked in disbelief.

“After that, we went to my Nana-Nani’s in Gujarat,” he said. “We were at the beach when BUMP! A whale shark pulled me underwater!”

“No,” said the boy.

Piya was intrigued. “Then what happened?”



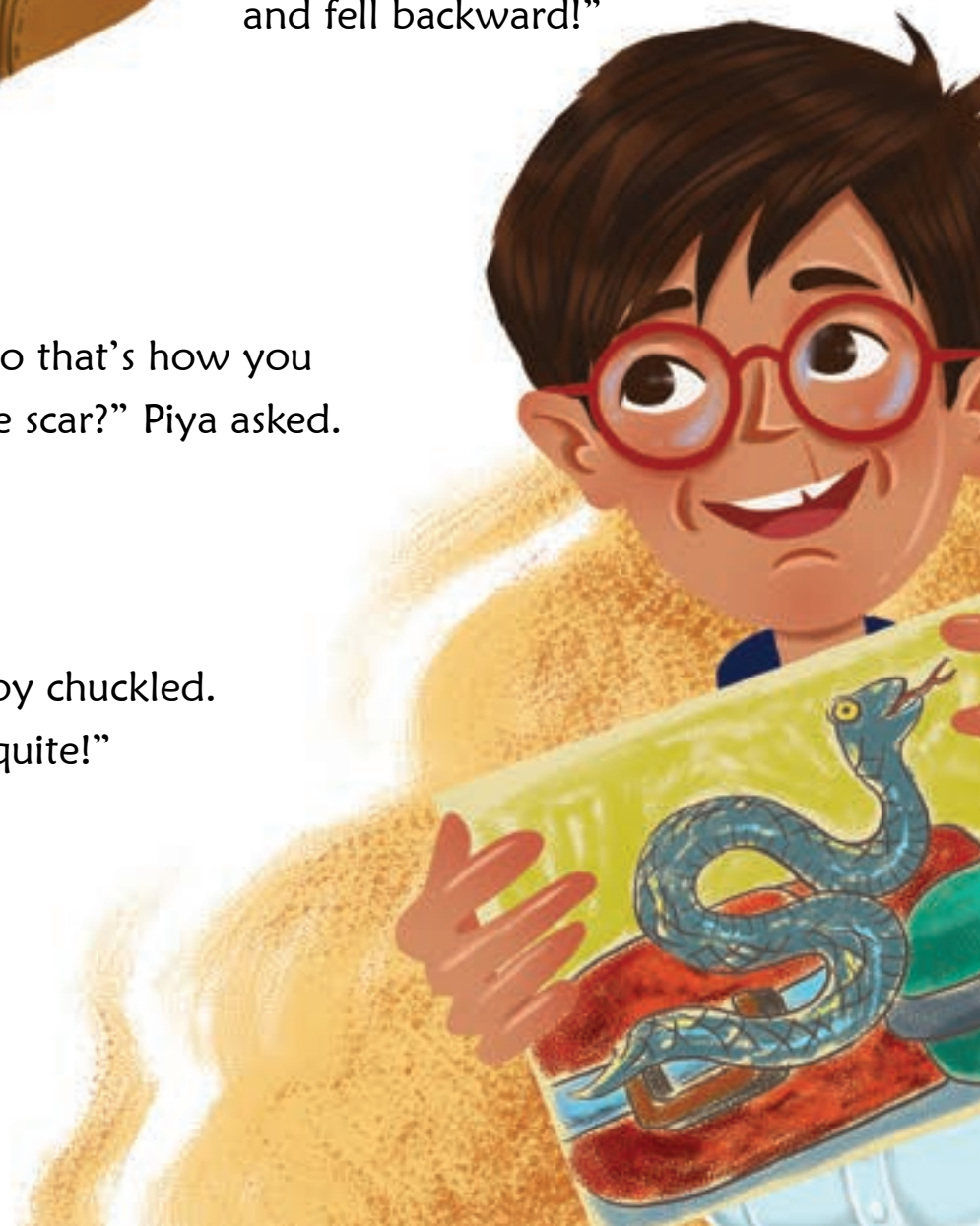


“We were heading back when,” he continued. “SSSSSS! A cobra slithered out from the luggage rack. It hissed but I tripped on my rucksack and fell backward!”

“I grabbed a coral and pushed myself free!” said the boy. “But things got crazier on the train ride home.”

“Oh, so that’s how you got the scar?” Piya asked.

The boy chuckled.
“Not quite!”



“My fall scared the snake and it slithered away!” said the boy.



He continued with his stories about how he then escaped a rhino ...



dodged an eagle ...

and fooled a crocodile.

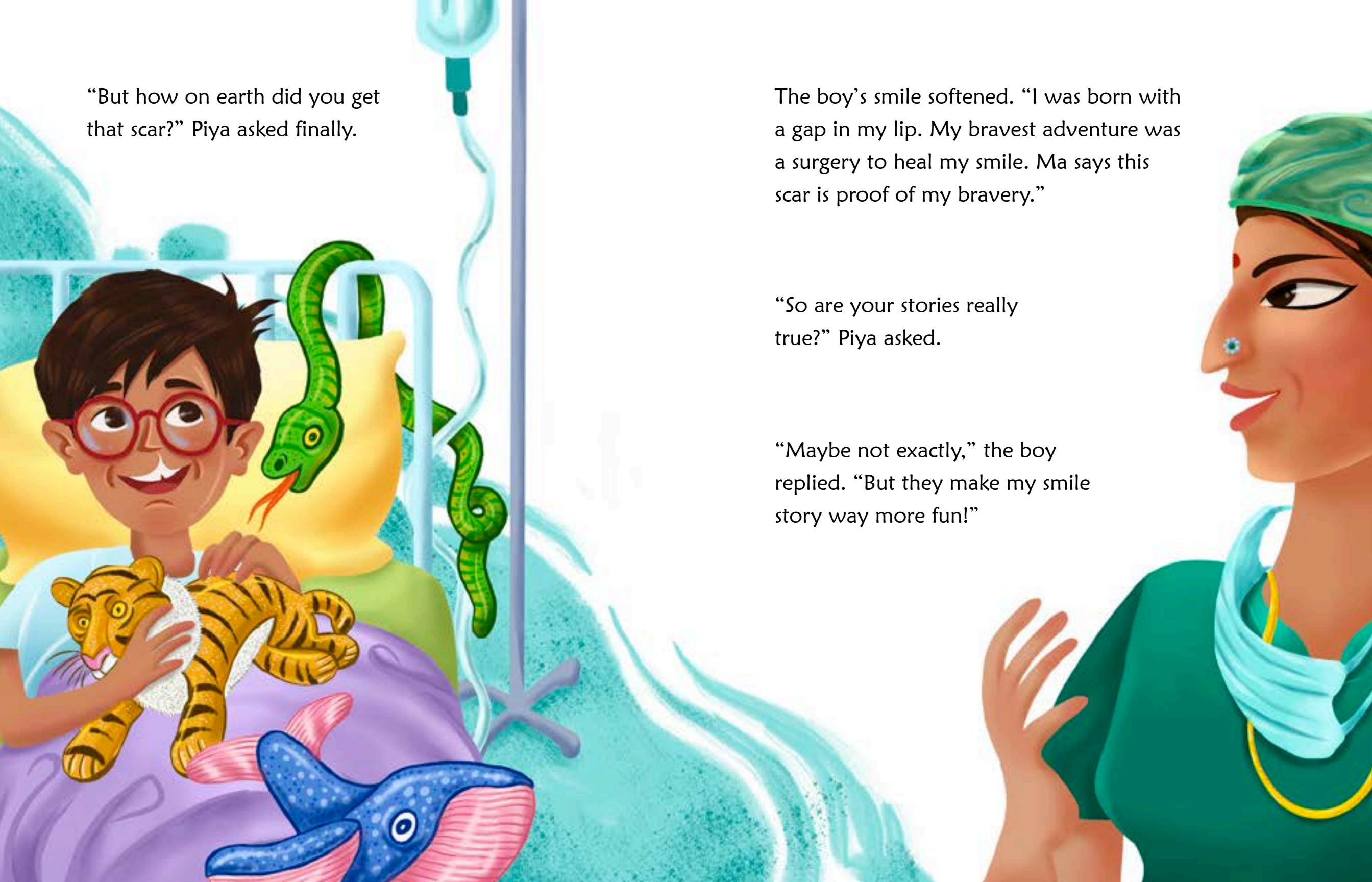


“But how on earth did you get that scar?” Piya asked finally.

The boy’s smile softened. “I was born with a gap in my lip. My bravest adventure was a surgery to heal my smile. Ma says this scar is proof of my bravery.”

“So are your stories really true?” Piya asked.

“Maybe not exactly,” the boy replied. “But they make my smile story way more fun!”



Piya thought for a moment, then sang out: “Happy Harsh with a brave, brave grin. A storytelling contest he can definitely win!”

The boy added: “He has found a friend who’s sitting by him now. They do make a perfect pair, and how!”

They both burst into giggles and their faces lit up with the brightest smiles.





Your Story, Your Spark!

Do you have a mark, a mole, a freckle, a funny bump, or a scratch?

Turn it into a wild, wonderful story and draw it right here!

Notes for Teachers and Parents

How to Explain a Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate to Children

1. **Start with Simple Terms:** Use easy language to explain a cleft lip and palate. For example: “Some babies are born with a cleft lip and/or a cleft palate. A cleft is a gap in the upper lip and/or the roof of the mouth.”
2. **Use Visual Aids:** Show pictures and diagrams of different types of clefts to help illustrate what you’re explaining.
3. **Explain the Challenges:** Describe the challenges children with clefts might face, such as difficulty eating, breathing, and speaking.
4. **Explain Surgery:** Describe how doctors can heal clefts with surgery. For example: “A cleft can be treated with surgery, which helps a person speak and eat more easily.”
5. **Emphasize Differences:** Help children understand everyone is unique. For example: “Some people wear glasses, some are tall, and some have clefts, but we are all special in our own ways!”
6. **Encourage Kindness:** Teach students to be supportive. For example: “If someone with a cleft has trouble speaking or eating, be patient and kind.”
7. **Interactive Discussion:** Let children ask questions such as, “Will the gap come back?” or “How do they treat it?” and answer them with reassurance.
8. **Promote Inclusivity:** Show that having a cleft doesn’t stop people from doing different activities. For example: “People with clefts can play, learn, and have fun just like everyone else!”
9. **Storytelling:** Inspire confidence by sharing stories of successful people with clefts or other differences.

Encourage kindness, respect, and understanding toward everyone, regardless of appearance.

Mamta Nainy is a writer based in New Delhi. She has authored over thirty-five books for children, many of which have gone on to win national and international awards, including the Valley of Words Awards 2022, FICCI Publishing Awards 2022, Publishing Next Award 2022, The Hindu Young World-Goodbooks Award 2019 and Peek-a-Book Children’s Choice Award 2019. Mamta is inspired by the unfettered imagination of children and is passionate about stories that are inclusive and empowering.

An MFA from Delhi School of Art, **Aniruddha Mukherjee** doodles non-stop, photographs riversides and can usually be spotted next to a pile of children’s books. He has illustrated a number of books for children. **Charulata Mukherjee** is an artist based in New Delhi. She loves illustrating for children, especially because she believes that children can see in her art what most adults can’t.



About Smile Train

Smile Train is the largest cleft charity in the world. Since 2000, they have been helping doctors and hospitals in India provide free cleft treatment to children in need. Smile Train works with more than 120 hospitals and has supported 750,000+ surgeries across India, helping children live healthy and full lives.

On her first day at a new school, Piya finds herself sitting next to a boy with a scar above his lip and a twinkle in his eye. Before she knows it, she's whisked away on wild adventures through jungles, oceans and train tracks—all without ever leaving her desk! But the biggest journey of all? Discovering the truth behind this boy's brave, beautiful smile.

A heartwarming tale about finding friendship, owning your story and celebrating every kind of smile.

