

# Machher Jhol

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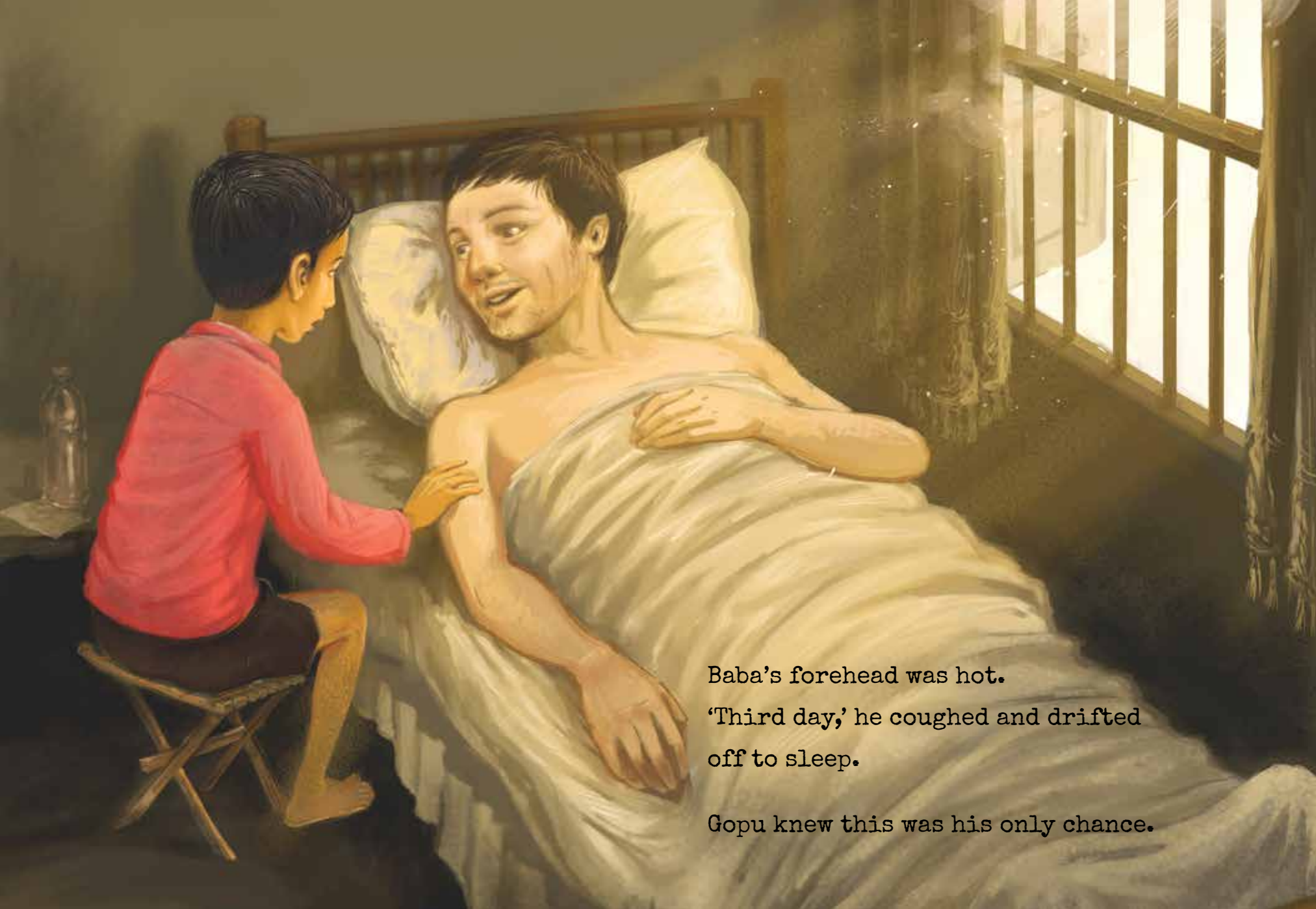
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# Machher Jhol

(Fish Curry)





Baba's forehead was hot.  
'Third day,' he coughed and drifted  
off to sleep.  
Gopu knew this was his only chance.





It was Sunday morning.

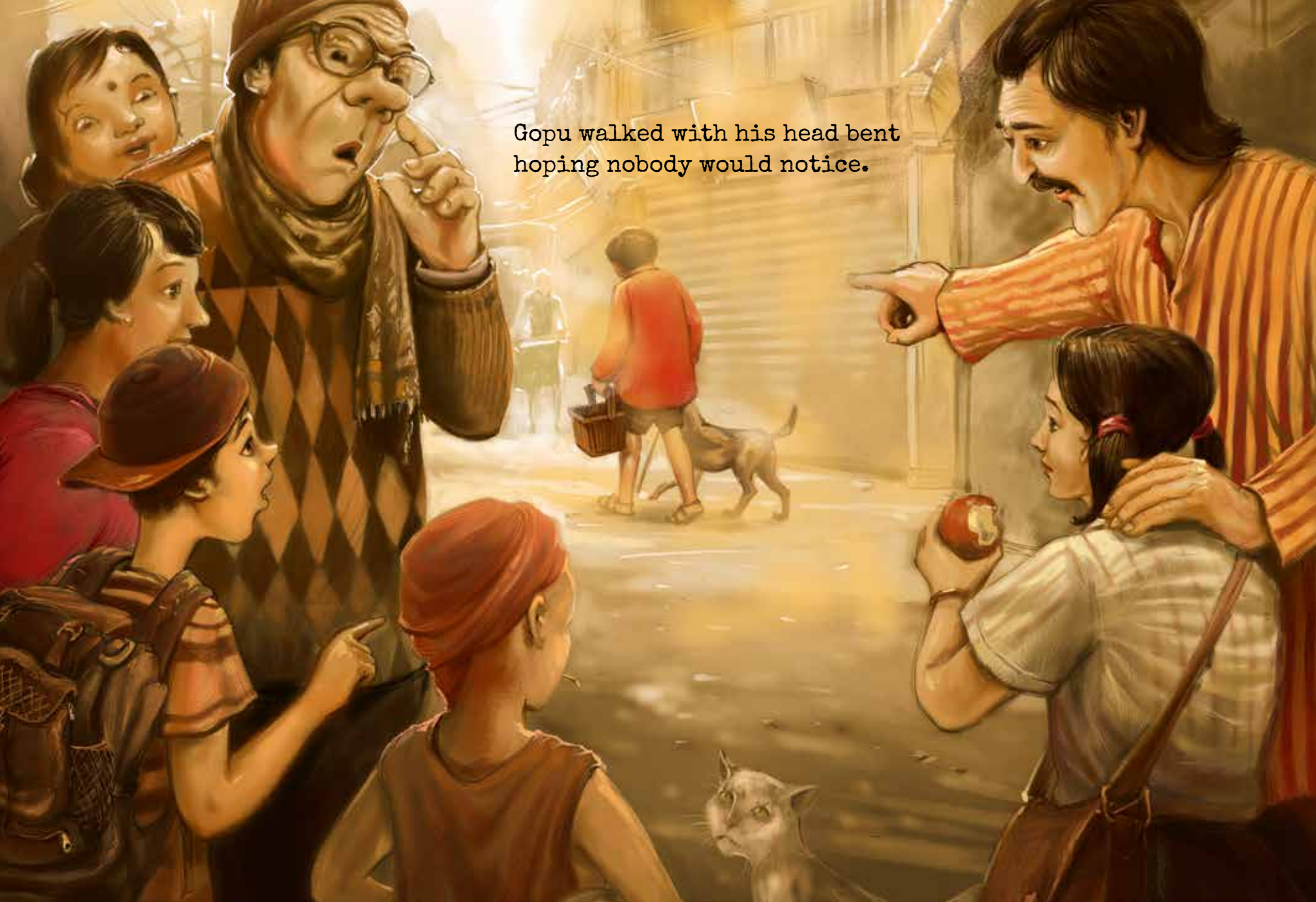
The only shop open was Robi Kaku's. 742 steps from his house.

That's the farthest Gopu had ever been out on his own.

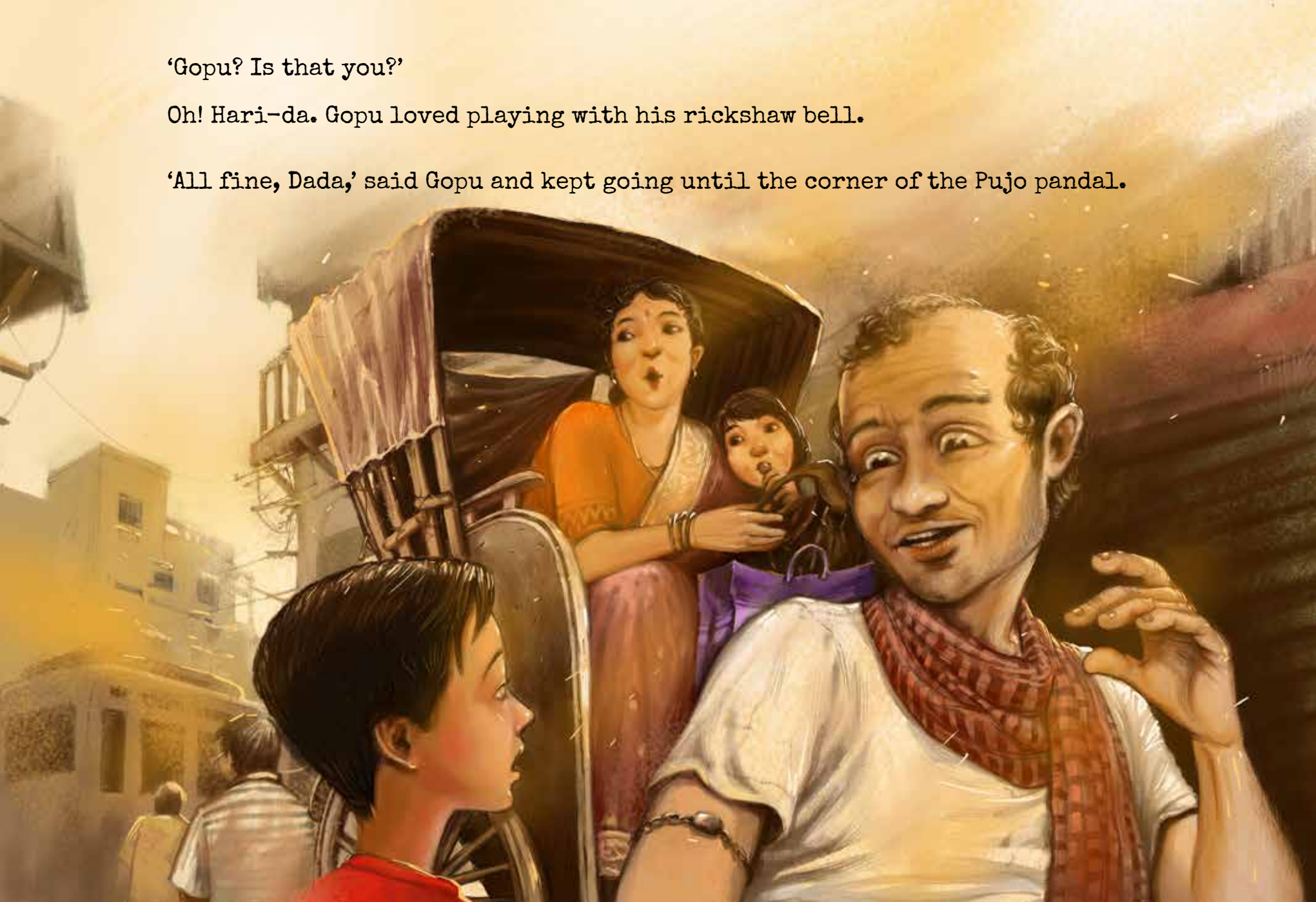
But today, he had other plans.







Gopu walked with his head bent hoping nobody would notice.




'Gopu? Is that you?'

Oh! Hari-da. Gopu loved playing with his rickshaw bell.

'All fine, Dada,' said Gopu and kept going until the corner of the Pujjo pandal.





The morning arti was on.

Ma Durga smiled at him.

'Baba says she always does when she blesses,' thought Gopu as he walked on.

The sound of the dhakis began to fade; the honking got bigger.

Gopu knew he was five steps away from the...



...the main road.



The footsteps, the jostle, the commotion.

Baba always said he loved the city's song.

Not Gopu. Noise rattled him.

But today, he pressed on.



Gopu held his breath as he entered  
the market. Baba loved how the place  
smelled of fish and chai and red chilly.

Not Gopu. Chilly made him sneeze.  
But today, he did not stop.





Ah! Fish. Finally.

Baba loved keeping the fish to his nose before buying.  
Not Gopu. It made him queasy. But today, he did it.

And walked out with the freshest fish in the market.



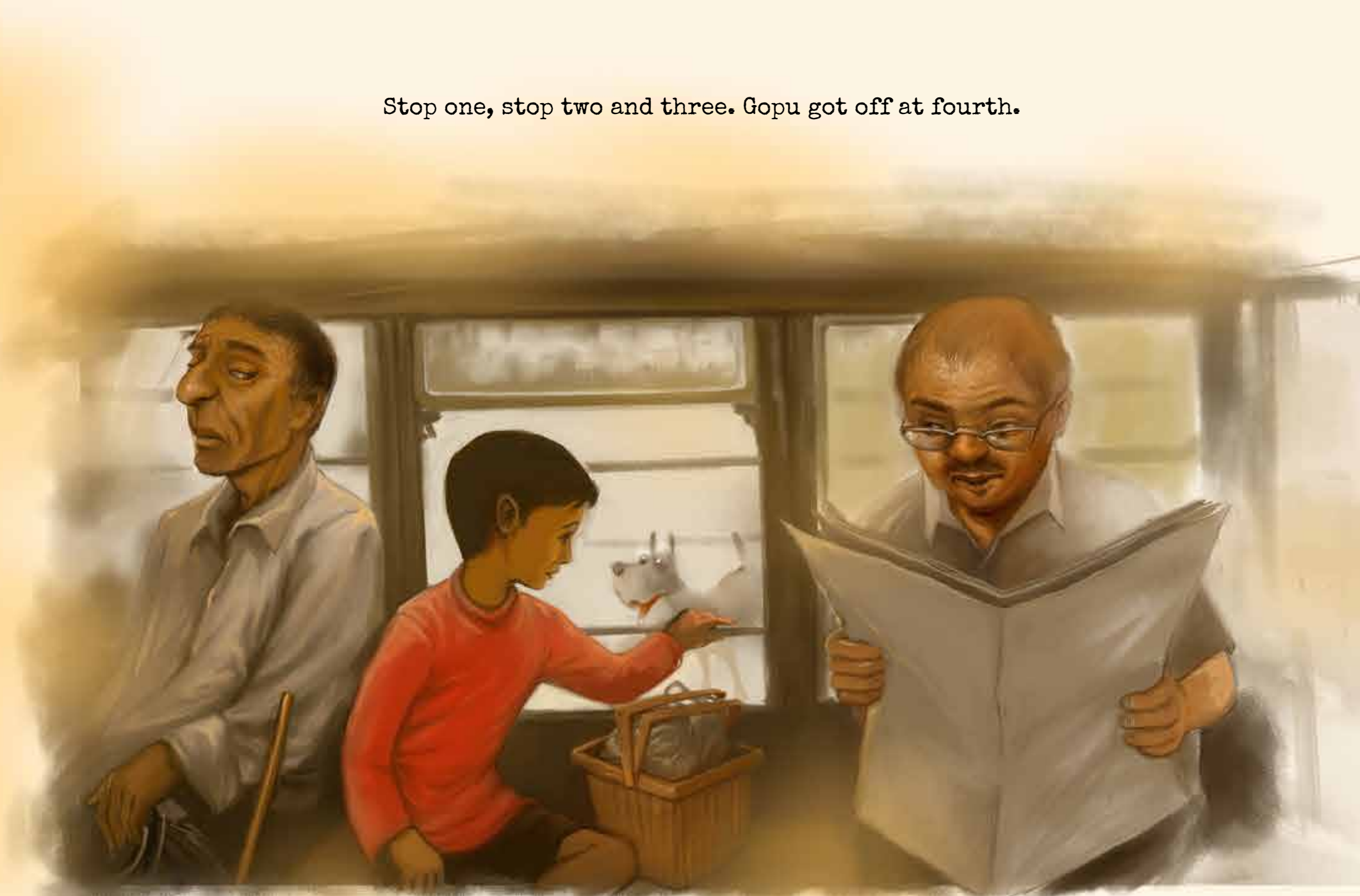




Outside the market stop, Gopu heard the tram in the distance.



Stop one, stop two and three. Gopu got off at fourth.





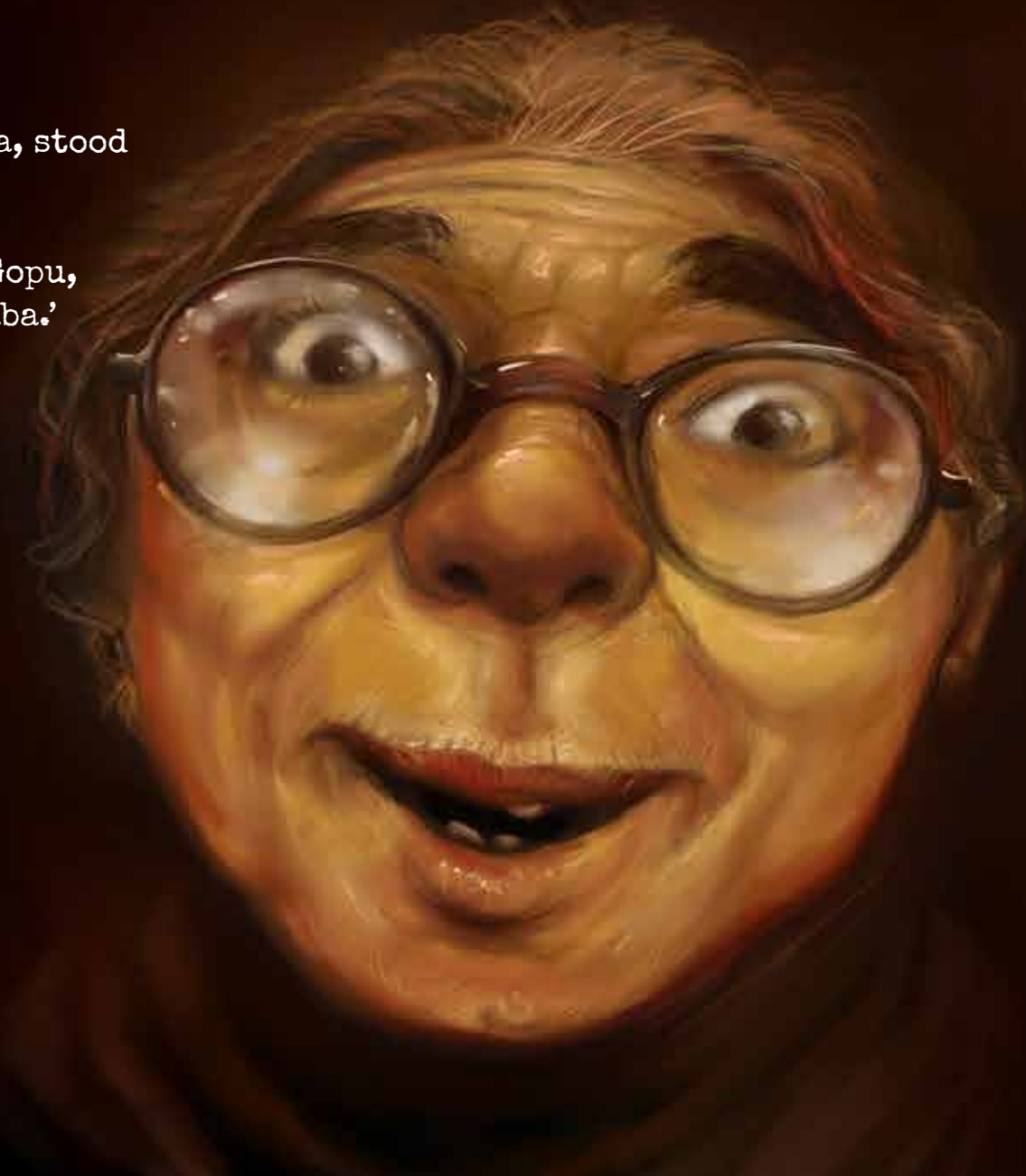
Gopu loved the feel of damp walls at Dida's house.



Knock. Knock.

Dida, Gopu's grandma, stood there shocked.

'I'll explain,' said Gopu,  
'please don't tell Baba.'





Ah! The delight of preparing machher jhol with Dida.

The mustard was ground into a paste, the red chilli seeds spluttered, the fish sizzled in the oil.

Gopu sneezed and coughed and his eyes watered. But he loved it.

'I will come with you,' said Dida.

'Dida, please, no,' Gopu pleaded.  
'This is a surprise for baba.'

She sounded worried.

Gopu promised he'd be careful.







He was.

Only three turns and 1849 steps before he handed Baba his favourite food.

Baba would be so happy!





When Gopu reached his house,  
something didn't feel right.

The lane had never been this  
quiet before.







'GOPU!' roared Baba.  
Angry words, hurtful words, worried words shot out of Baba's  
mouth.

Gopu did not know Baba was capable of such anger.

All of a sudden, Baba went quiet.

'BABA! Baba!' Gopu screamed and rushed towards him.





Before he knew it, Baba had wrapped him in his arms.  
'Sorry, Baba,' Gopu sobbed, 'I will never do it again.'

'Na, Gopu,' said Baba. 'I am sorry. I don't know what all I said to you.'  
'How did you do it alone?'

'I didn't!' Gopu sniveled. 'I had you with me, Baba; you have shown me everything!'







That machher jhol was the tastiest they had ever had.

Something told Gopu that Dida was there too. But he did not ask; Baba did not say.

Baba was already feeling better.





Better enough to fry their own bhaja in the evening.



