



# Machher Jhol

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# Machher Jhol

(Fish Curry)

Richa Jha and Sumanta Dey

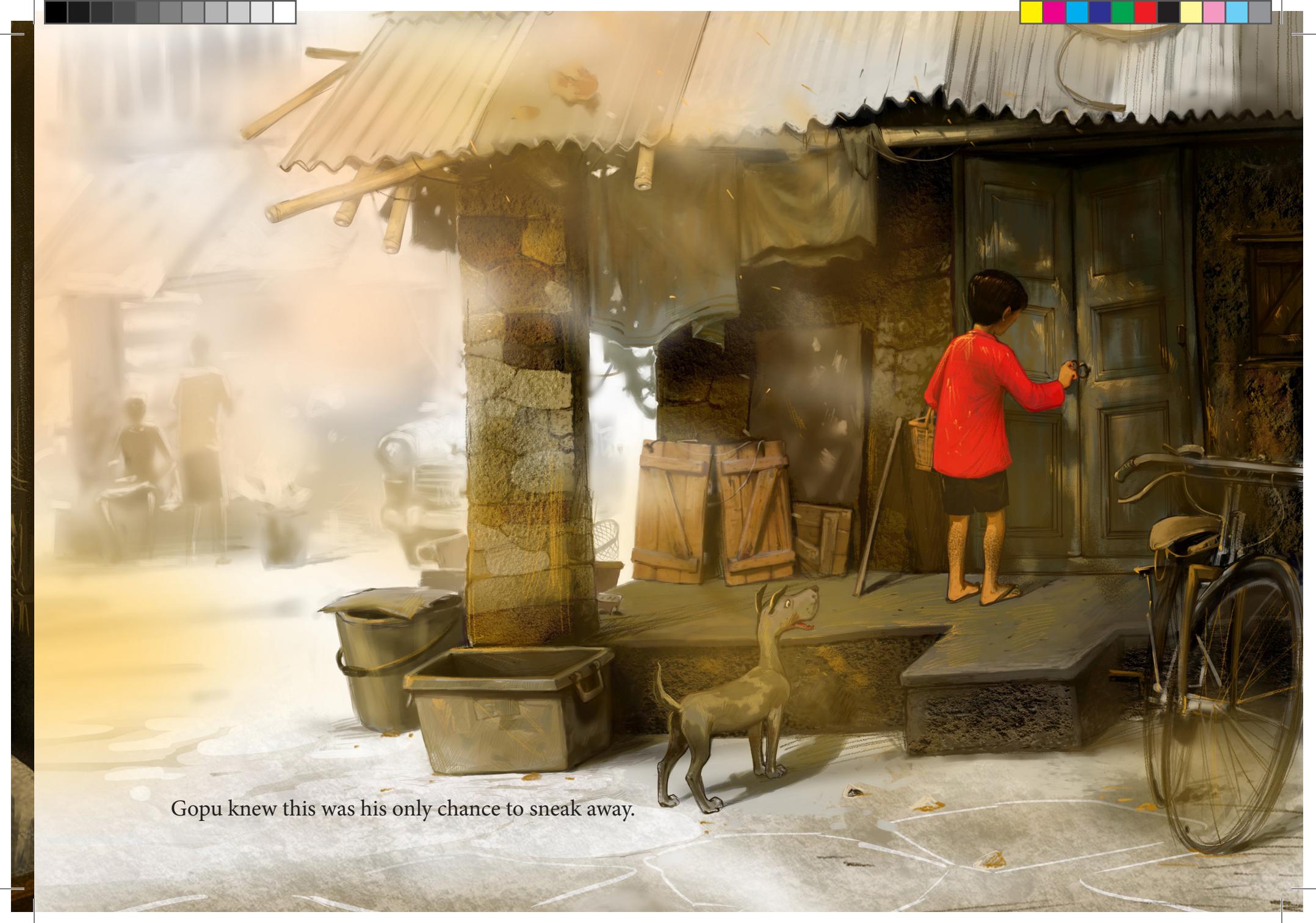


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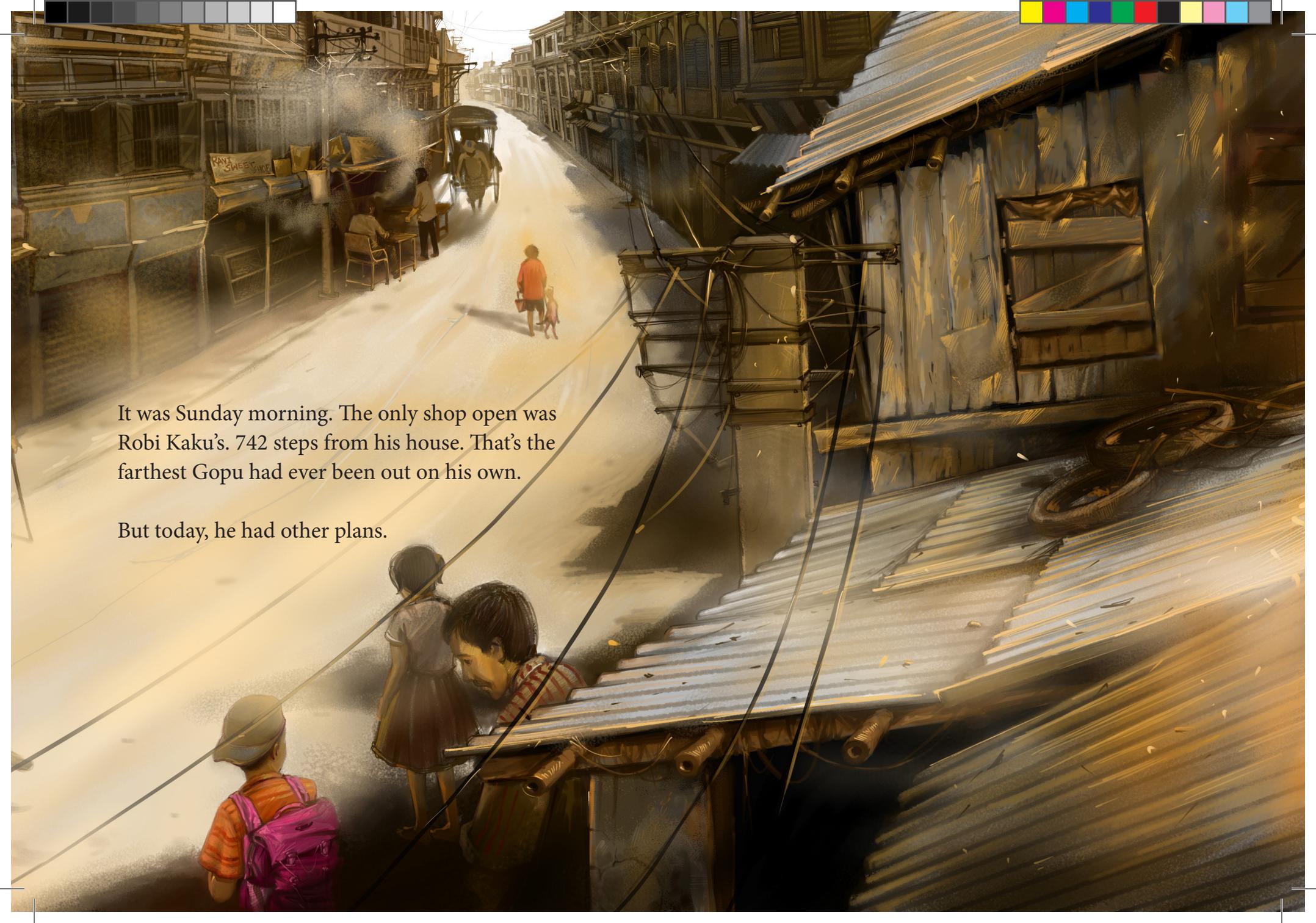


Baba's forehead burned.  
'Third day,' he coughed and drifted off to sleep.



Gopu knew this was his only chance to sneak away.





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 hoped nobody would notice him.

Someone did.

'Gopu? Is that you?'

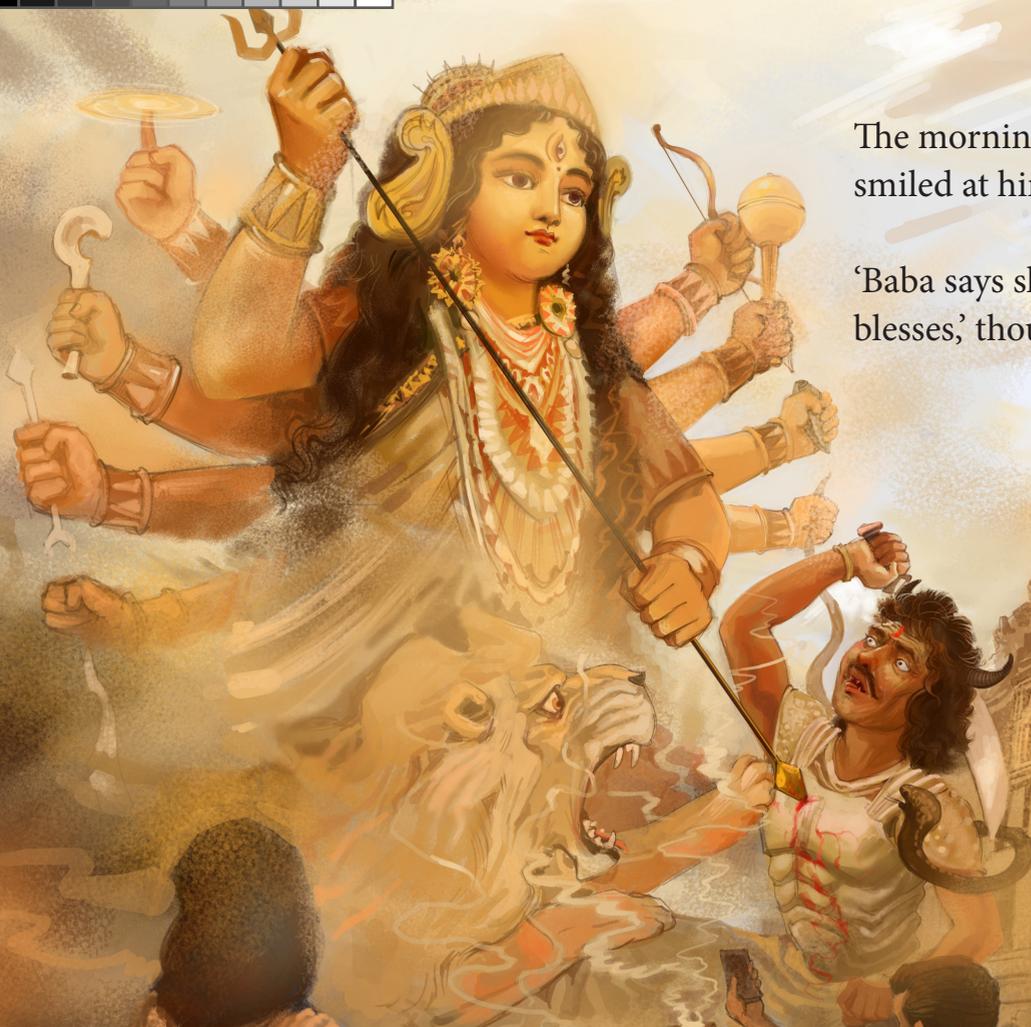
Oh! Hari-da. Gopu loved playing with his rickshaw bell. 'All fine, Dada,' said Gopu and kept going until the corner of the Pujjo pandal.





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.

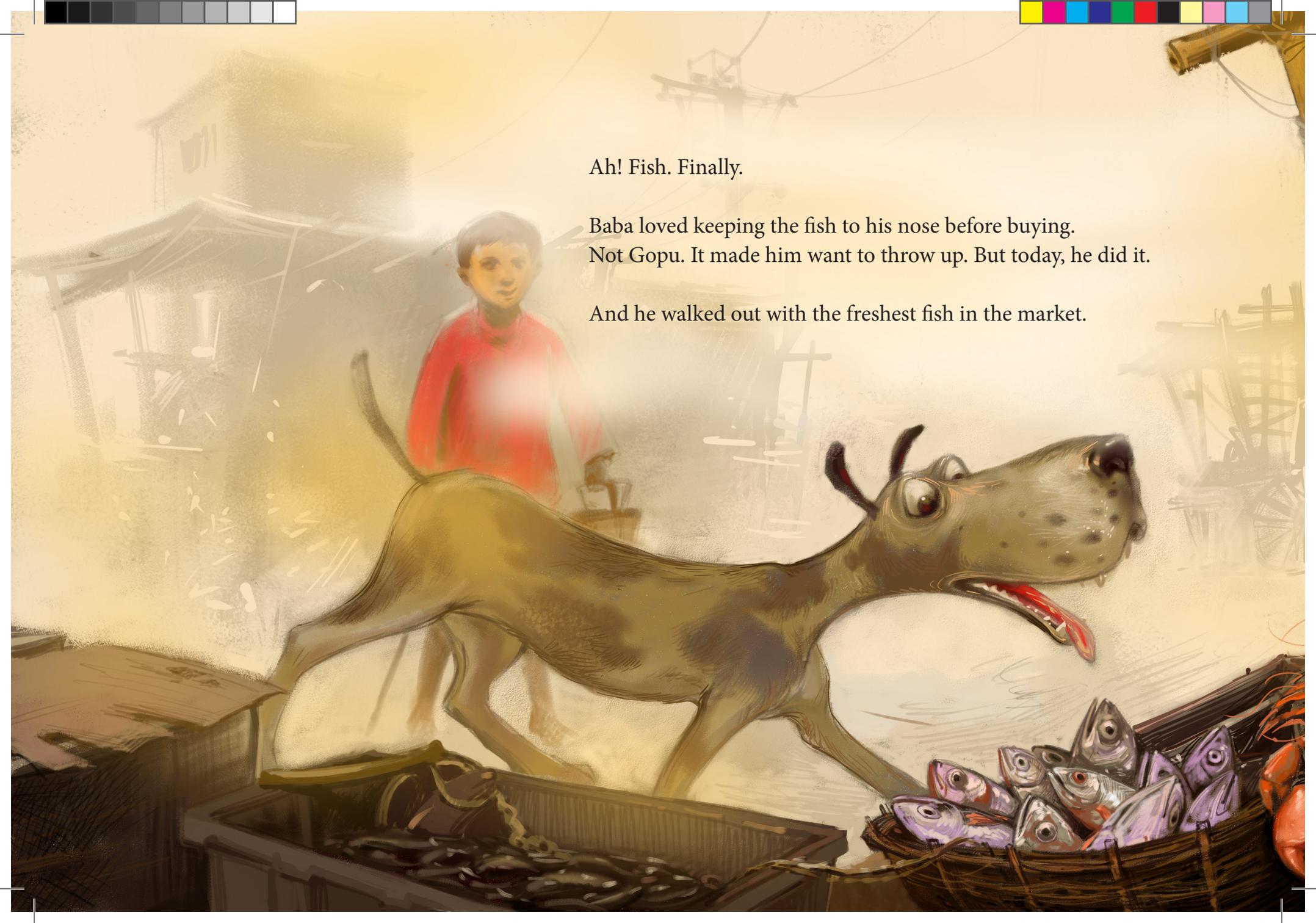


Gopu held his breath as he entered the market.  
Baba loved how the place smelled of fish and  
chai and red chilly.

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





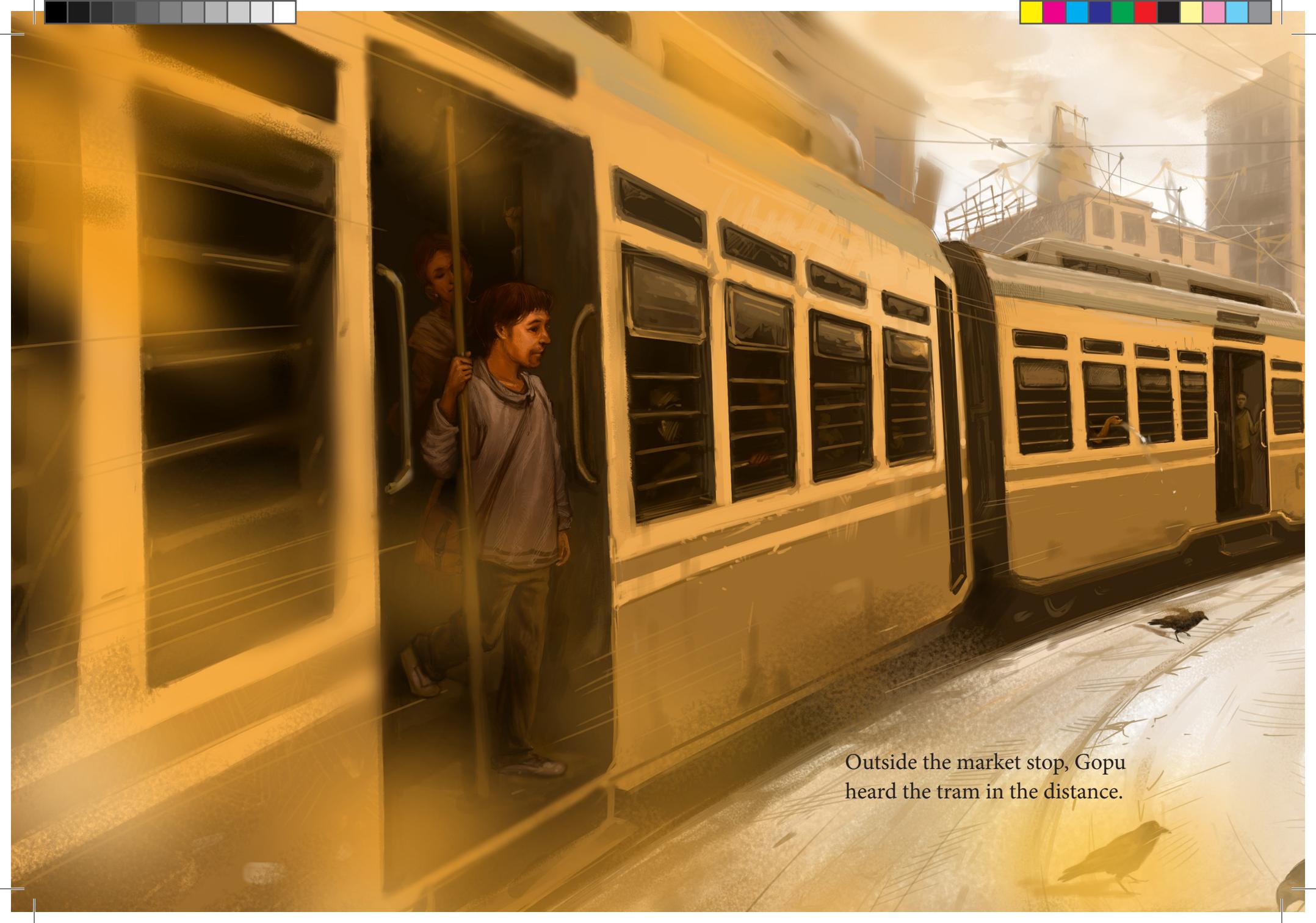


Ah! Fish. Finally.

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

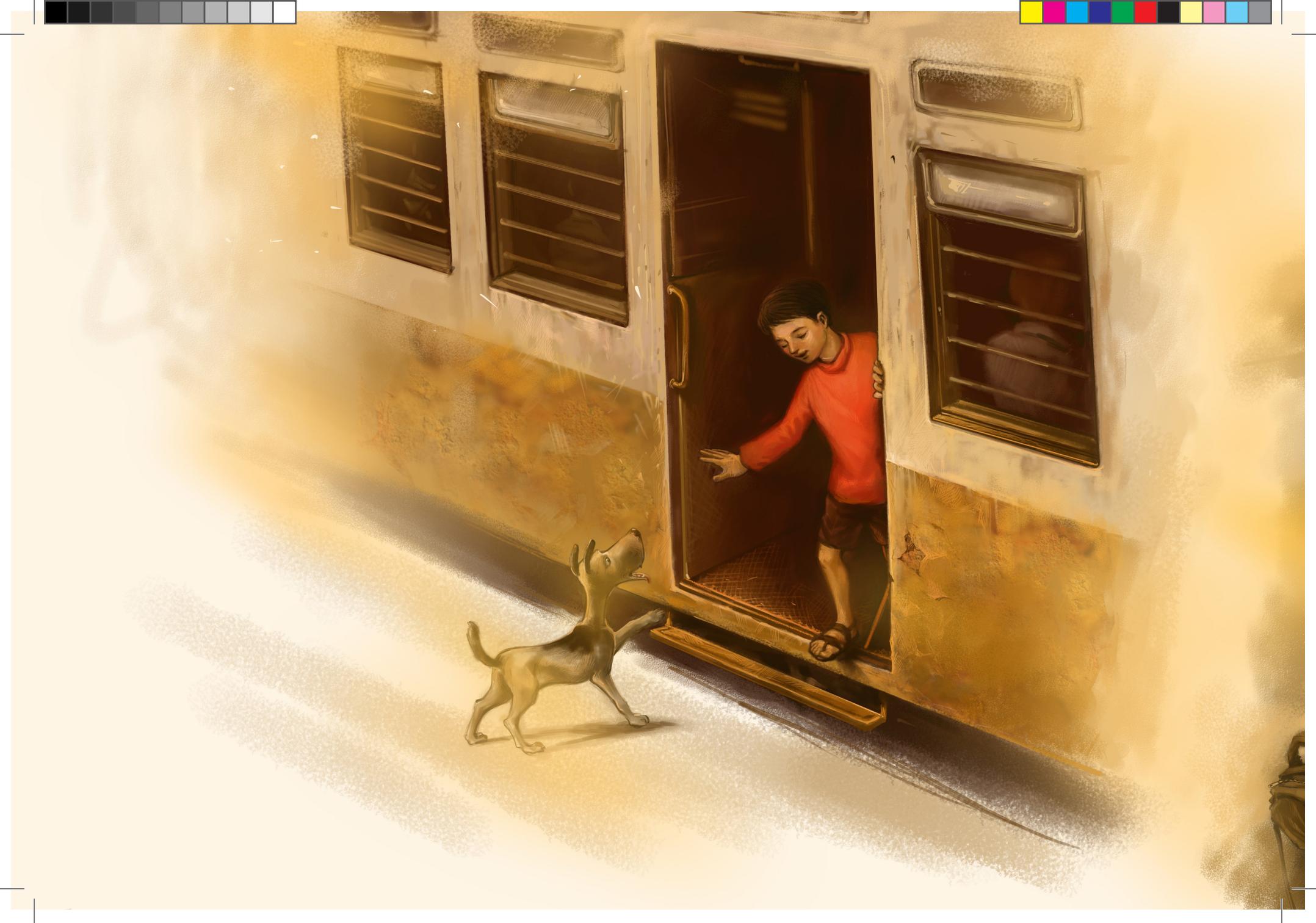
And he walked out with the freshest fish in the market.





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.

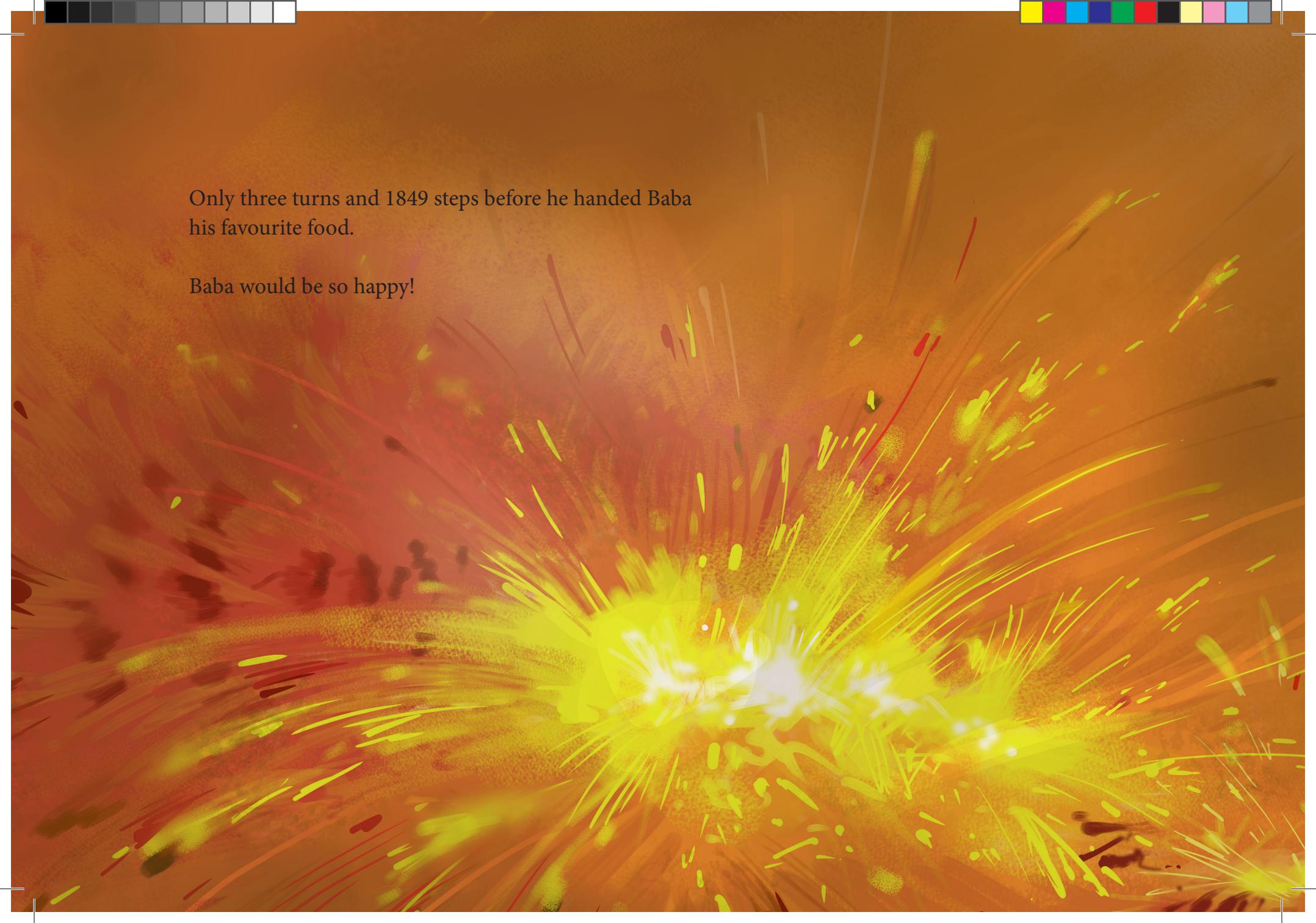






Only three turns and 1849 steps before he handed Baba  
his favourite food.

Baba would be so happy!







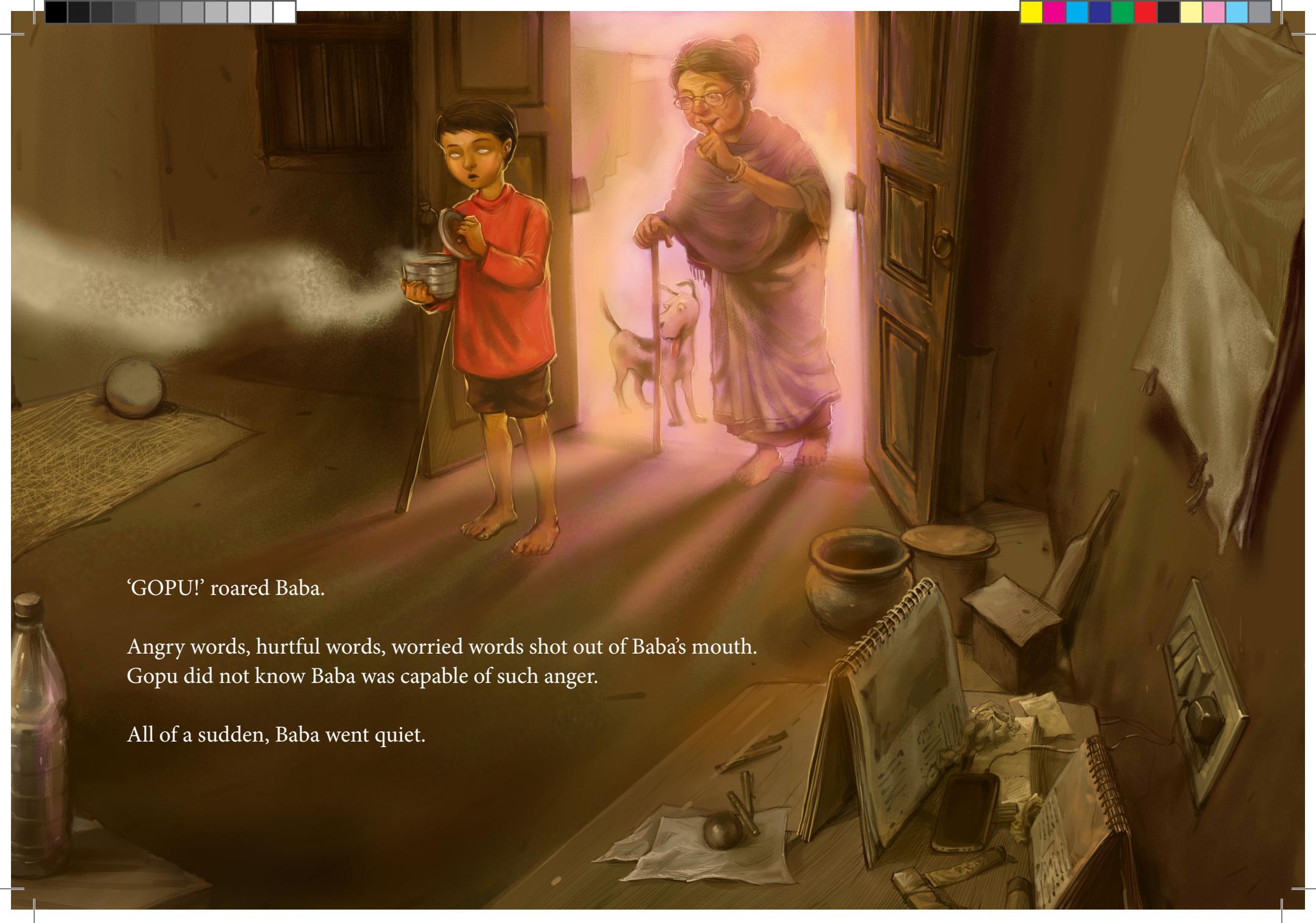
When Gopu reached his house, something didn't feel right.

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.





Before he knew it, Baba had wrapped him in his arms.

‘Who will believe you can’t see, Gopu,’ said Baba. ‘How did you do it alone?’

‘I had you with me, Baba; you have shown me everything!’ said Gopu.





That machher jhol was the tastiest they'd ever had.



Gopu told Baba about the honking and the fish and the tram.

'Unbelievable!' said Baba. He was already sounding better.





Better enough to fry their own bhaja in the evening.



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

Hear the footsteps, the jostle and the commotion  
as Gopu walks down the busy lanes of Kolkata.

Where is he going? Why is he alone?

