



That Night

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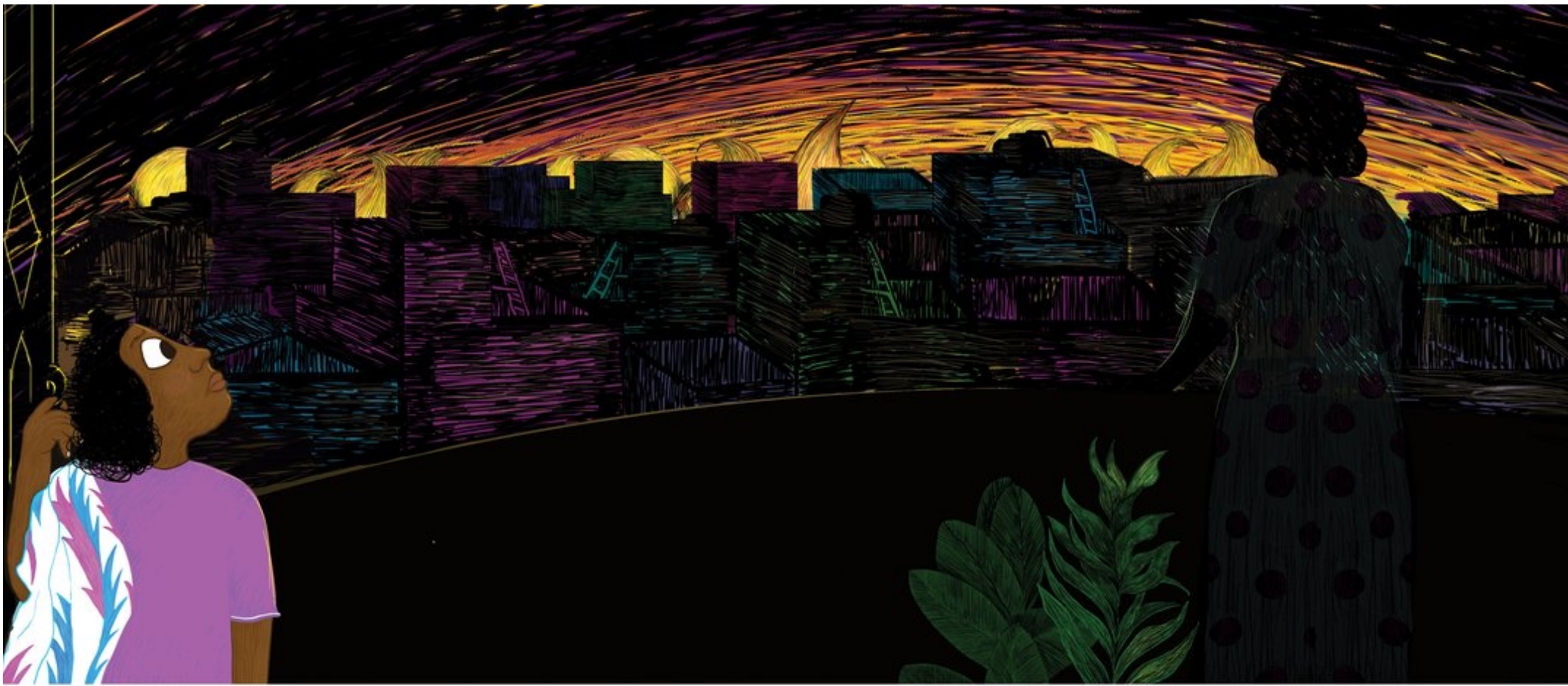
Illustrator: Shrujana Shridhar

Level 3



The voices woke Chaitu up. They sounded angry. Loud and angry.

She clutched Noonu, her blanket, closer. It smelled of sleep, milk, and dreams.

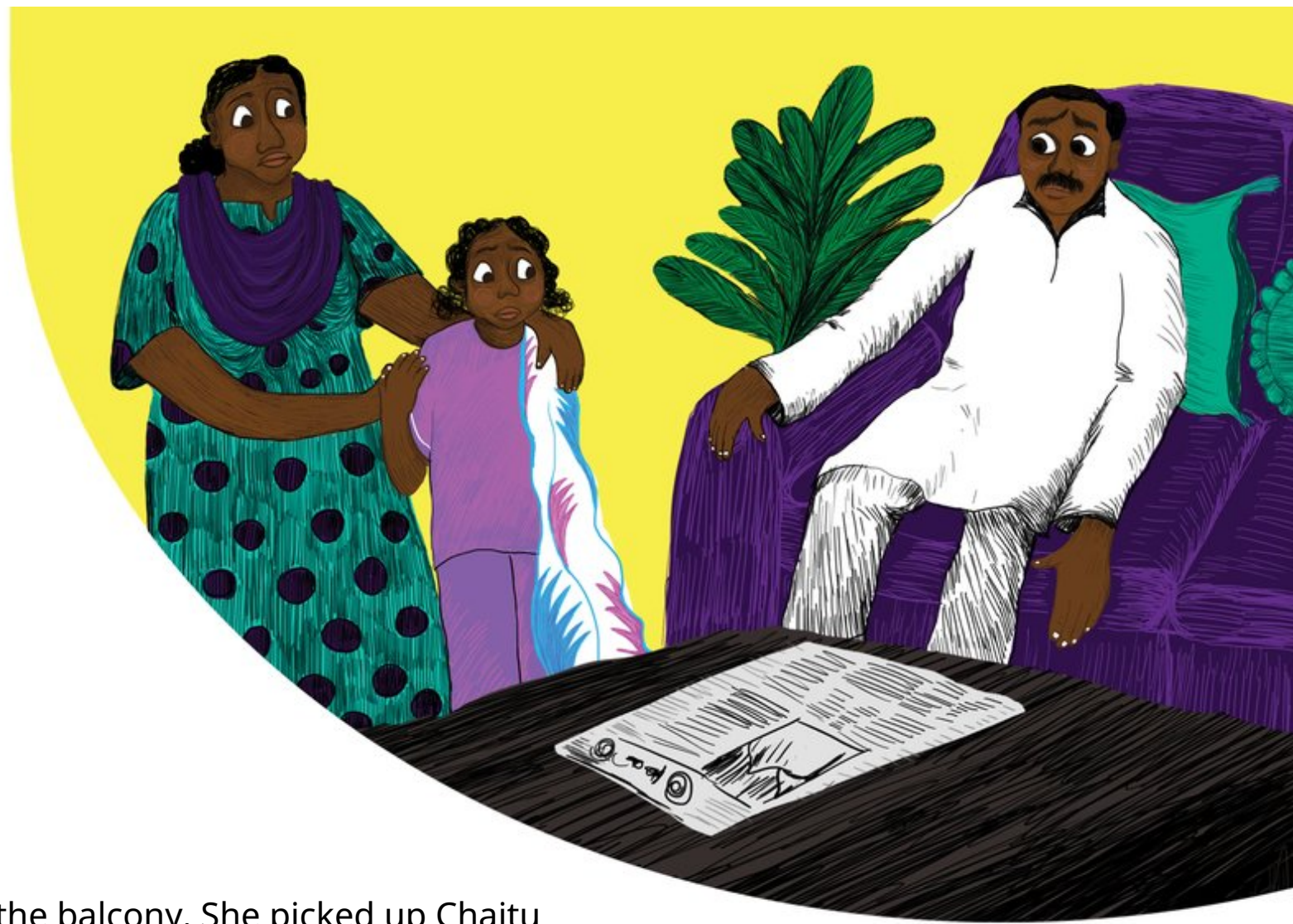


Chaitu went out to the passage. She could see Mummy standing in their balcony.
The voices had become louder and angrier.
They rose higher and higher until they became an ugly giant.

“Mummy?” she whispered. Mummy didn’t hear her. She was listening to the voices,
telling a story with her hands.



There was no moon that night. The sky was hazy with fog and smoke. It stung her eyes. Far across the rooftops, Chaitu could see fire leaping like the furious dragon in her storybook. Wasn't that where her friend Kabir lived? Chaitu's tummy squirmed.



Mummy came in from the balcony. She picked up Chaitu and turned to Papa, who looked anxious. “They want you to go out,” she said quietly. “They won’t leave until then. They want to make sure that you aren’t—” Her voice trailed off.



No, no, no—Chaitu wanted to scream. But her voice wasn't working. She didn't want Papa to go out. What if the shouting voices and the furious fire swallowed him up?

She had heard stories from her friends at school. People were called out in the night and they never returned.

Chaitu clung on to Papa's hand.
Gently, he shook it free.

And he was gone.



“What do the angry people want, Mummy?” Chaitu whispered.

“They want to know where we are from,” she said sadly.

“But we are from here, aren’t we?”

“Yes, we are from here. *We all* belong here. But not everyone thinks that way. Anyone who isn’t the same as them, they want to send away.”

“But where would they go? Why should they go? This is their home too. I don’t understand.”

“I also don’t,” Mummy said, with a sigh.



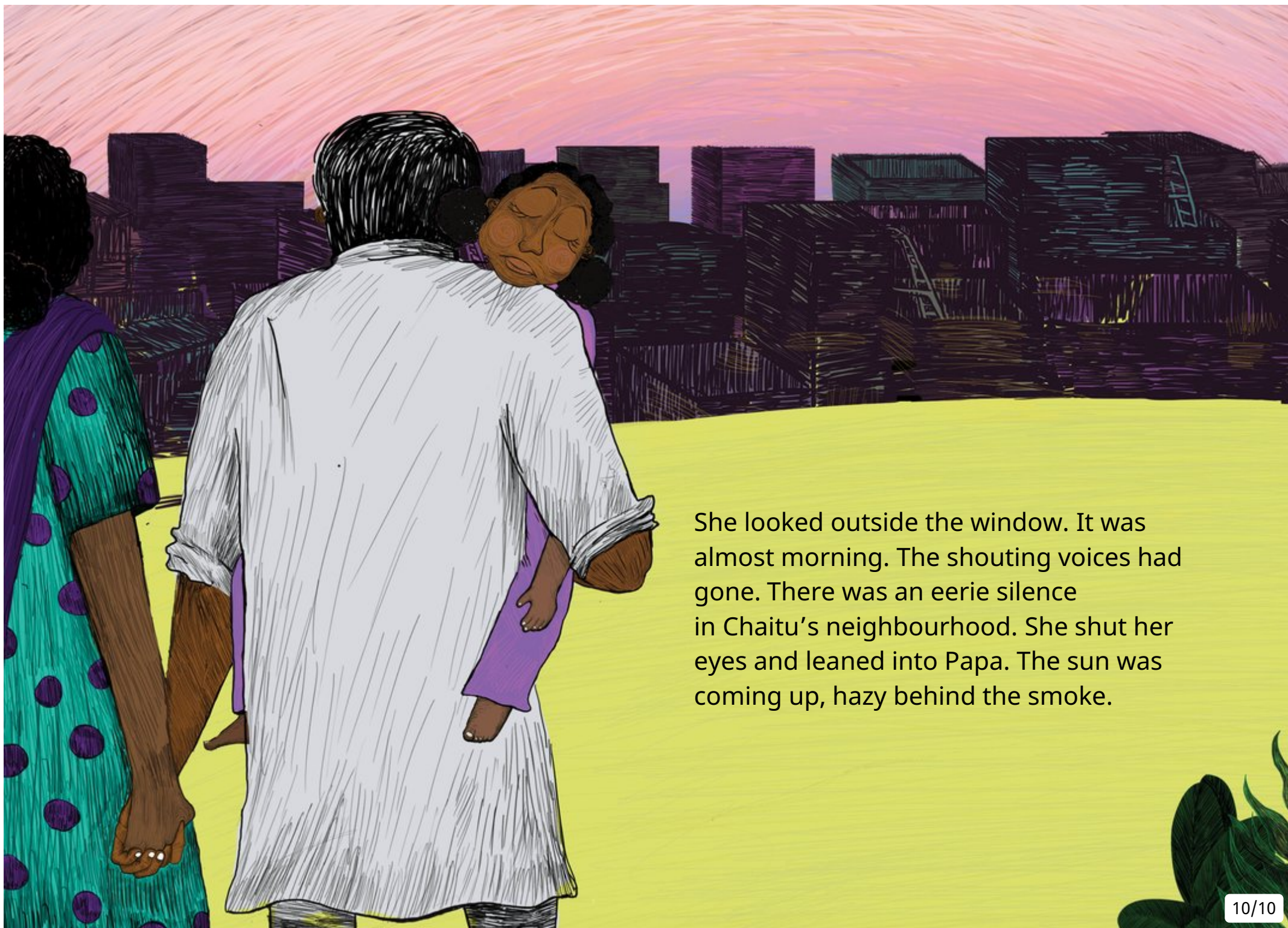
Where was Papa? He still hadn't returned. It felt like forever since he'd walked out of the door.

Mummy was clutching her too hard, but Chaitu didn't mind. She was clutching Noonu just as tight.

It felt like someone was clutching her heart.



At last they heard footsteps on the stairs and the key turning in the lock. Was that Papa? The door opened and Papa walked into the room. He looked tired and sad. Chaitu felt her heart go fump. Papa was back.



She looked outside the window. It was almost morning. The shouting voices had gone. There was an eerie silence in Chaitu's neighbourhood. She shut her eyes and leaned into Papa. The sun was coming up, hazy behind the smoke.

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(English)

Chaitu wakes up to loud and angry voices. The night is dark but a fire rages in the distance. Chaitu is terrified for her family, friends and home. Why are these voices so angry? What do they want? A story set in a world fed by fear and intolerance.

This is a Level 3 book for children who are ready to read on their own.



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