



Mission Cycle

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Level 4



Is it morning already?
Why didn't Ammi or Abbu wake me
up?
Did they forget I have school?
Did they forget me?
Where *is* everybody?



“Noorain! You woke up by yourself!” Ammi says. I cosy up to her.

Why is everyone so *serious*? And how come Ammi, Abbu, Dadu, and Nani are watching TV in the morning?

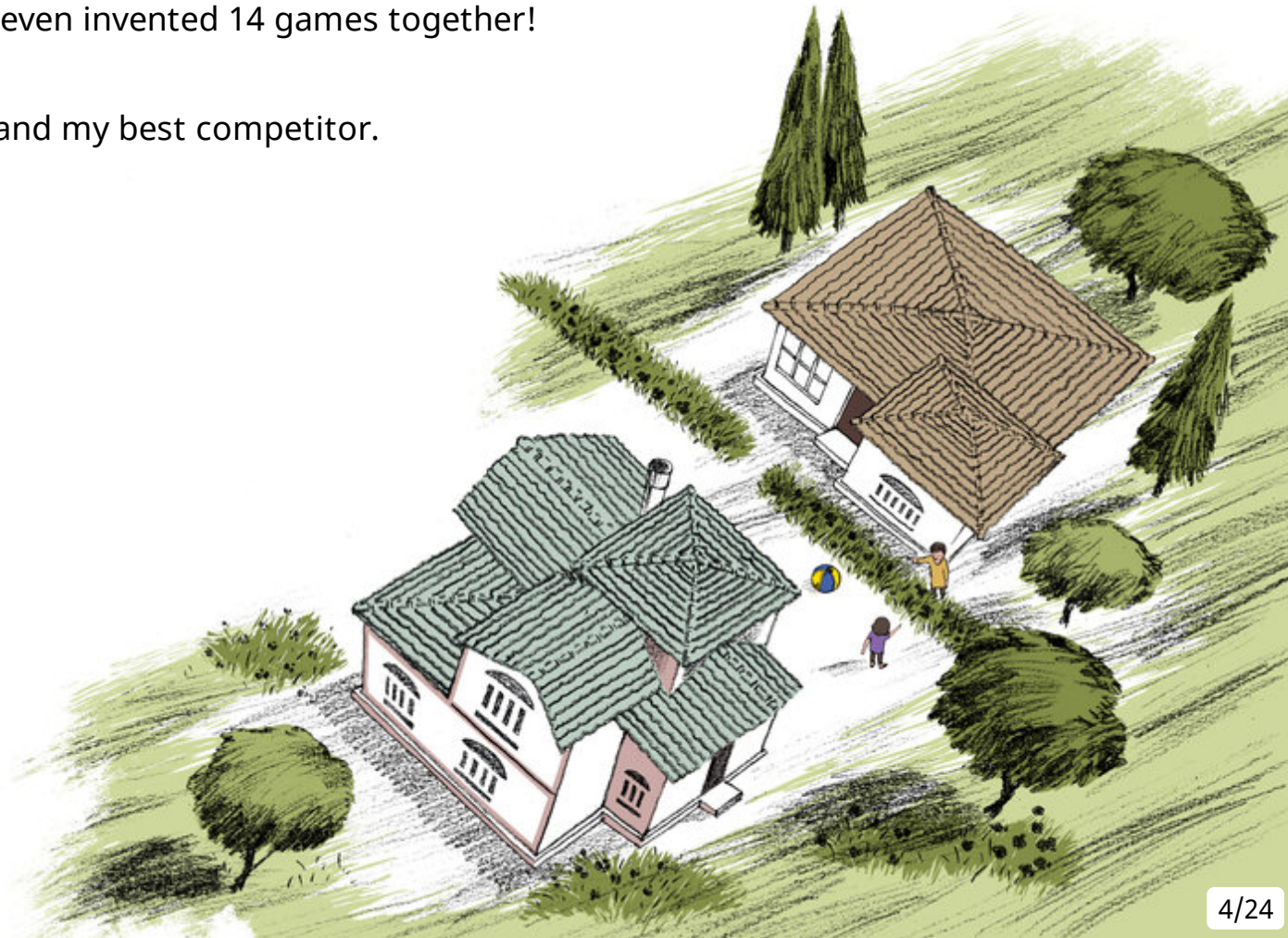
“Ammi, is it Sunday?” I ask. Ammi is a science teacher, and we usually walk to school together.

“No, Noorie, school is cancelled today,” she says.

“Oh,” I say, acting as disappointed as I can. I’m secretly thrilled! “I guess I’ll just have to go to Wasim’s to play,” I say.

Wasim and I are both in the second standard, but in different classes. We have been neighbours since we were babies. We have spent many holidays playing, swinging from apple trees and shouting over the rose bushes until our families yelled at us. We have even invented 14 games together!

He is my best friend, and my best competitor.





Abbu gives me some milk and chochwor bread. The bread is from Wasim's family bakery. It has a special touch: raisins. I love it.

"Noorie, no use going over to Wasim's," Abbu says. "He left for Jammu with his Ammi for a few days."



News: Protests in Kashmir Security Forces have been deployed to bring the situation in control. Chaos remains for the next few

The news looks scary today. Nani raises the TV volume. Ammi, Abbu, Dadu and Nani have one of their silent talks. Ammi raises her eyebrows till they are question marks. Abbu shakes his head and sticks his lip out. Dadu spells out some letters softly: C-U-R-F-E-W. They all look worried.

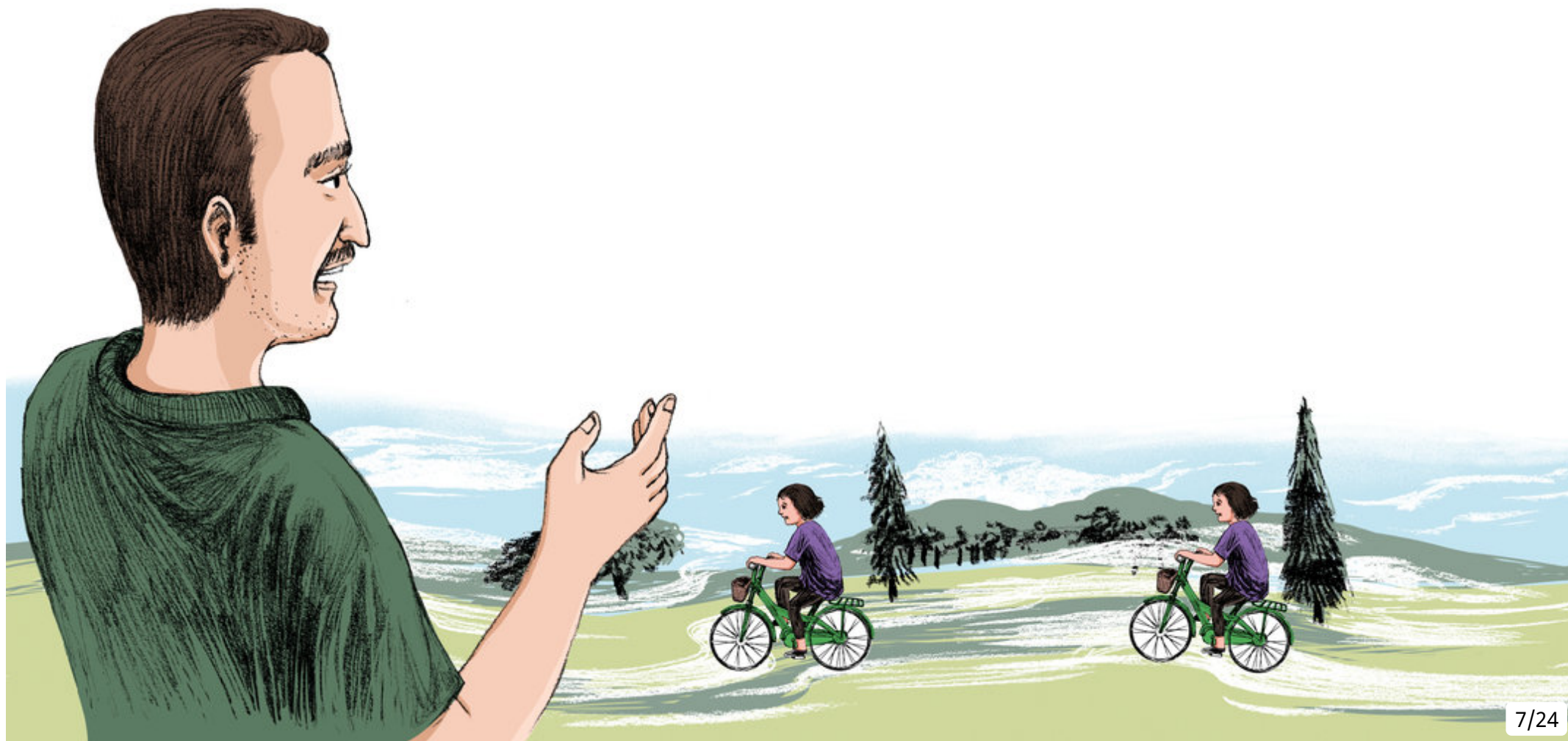
But why did Wasim go to Jammu?

A few days ago, walking back from school, Wasim said we should both learn to ride the bicycle: "Let's learn in one month, and we can race to school. Okay?"

Oh! Maybe Wasim went to Jammu to learn cycling from his cousin Rafiq. How was I to learn to cycle now?

Just then, Abbu says he won't be going to office. "There are more CRPF guards on the street today, so my editor said I could work from home," Abbu says.

Abbu is home? Then I shouldn't waste a second! "Abbu! Can you teach me to ride the new bicycle please? ... Please, Abbu!"





Abbu looks at me and says, "Of course, Noorie. But eat your breakfast first."
I chomp on it fast!
O great milk and chochwor bread! Do your magic. Make me strong! Make me strong for
Mission Cycle!



Mission Cycle: Day 1

The cycle is my Eid present from Abbu and Ammi! I clean it till it shines bright.
Tring Tring! I love the shrill bell.

“Abbbuuuuuuuuuu!”

Nani says, “Noorie! Why are you shouting? Abbu has just walked out to see how things are!”

“But Abbu promised he would teach me to ride the cycle!”

Nani puts her garden tools aside. “Oh, cycle? I can teach you,” she says.

“But Nani, do you even know how to ride a bicycle?” I ask.

“I was the fastest cyclist in my entire school, Noorie, my girl. Now, put your feet on the pedals, look straight at that wall, and start pedalling.”



I look at the wall in front of me, focusing on that one peach on the tree.

Focus...

Focus...

Focus!

Where is Nani? As I turn to look back,

THADAAAM!





I did not see that wall at all.

Nani comes running, "Noorie, are you hurt?"

I check. I am not. But I still feel like crying. "Cycling is hard, Nani."

"Nonsense," says Nani. She plants a kiss on my forehead. "The first thing you have to remember about cycling is to keep looking ahead. The second thing, is that falling is okay. It's how you learn."

I get back on my cycle.



Day 2

"On your mark.... Get set... Go!"



Day 3

After cycling practice, Nani and I pick apples. I steal a look at the street outside – there are no people.

“When your Abbu was your age, we had to stay indoors like this,” Nani says. Turns out, that was when she taught Ammi and Maasi to cycle. They fell all the time, and came running to her.

“You are so brave, my Noorie. You will be a really good cyclist.”

“Faster than Wasim?” I ask.

“The fastest!”

Day 4

“Naniiiiiiiii!”

Oho! Nani is drying vegetables on the terrace for winter. Now who will help me ride the cycle?

“Shall I teach you?” Dadu asks, from behind his newspaper.

It’s so strange to see Dadu at home at this time. Strange, but amazing! “Dadu, aren’t you going for a walk with your friends?”

“Can’t. There’s C-U-R-F-E-W. I might as well get some exercise running behind my granddaughter!”

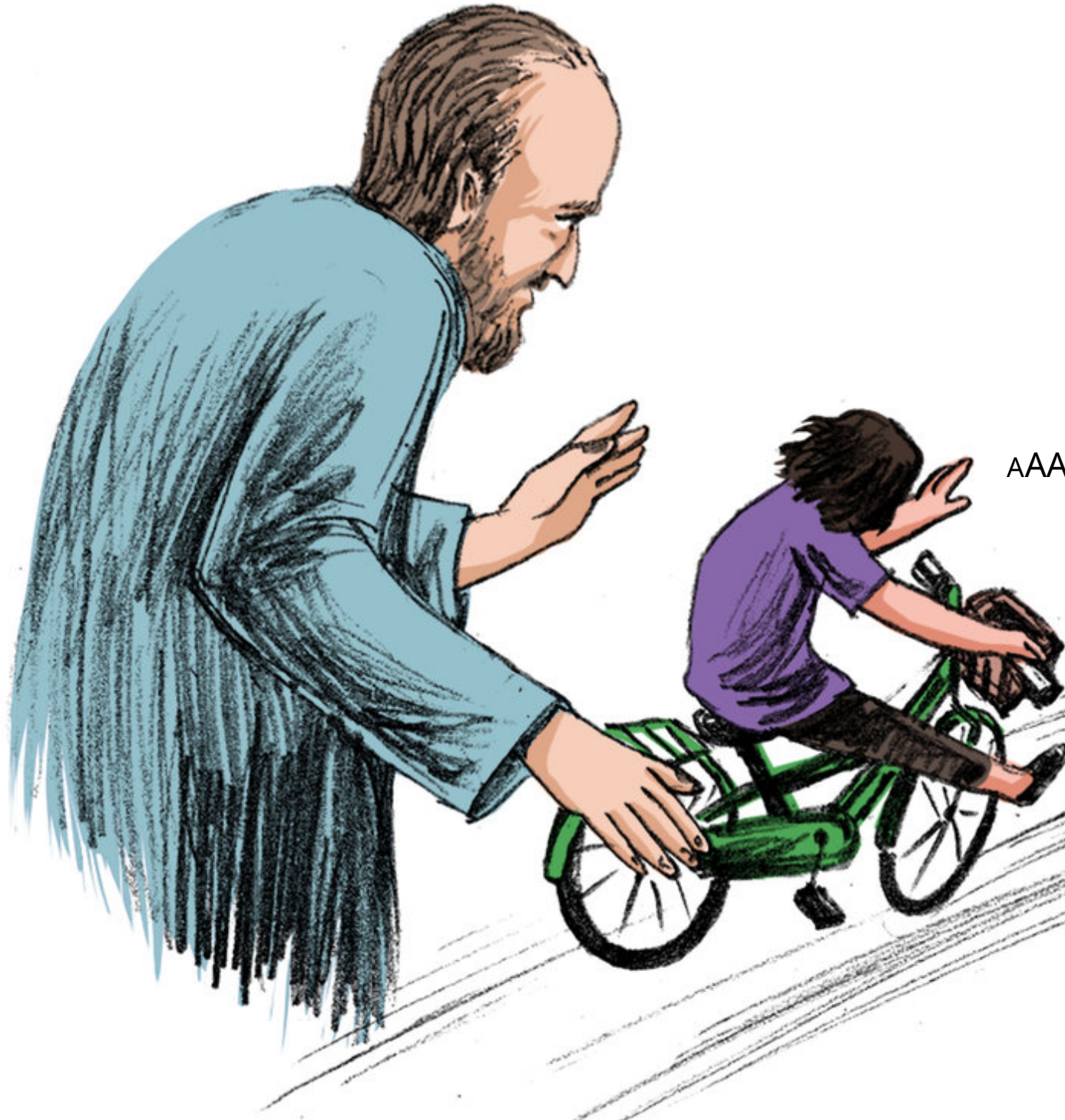
Yay! I prepare myself to look at the peach again, and try not to think of falling.

But then Dadu makes a scary suggestion. He wants to remove the trainer wheels at the back of my cycle!



Can I really ride on only two wheels? That is like being in a circus!
When I say that to Dadu, he laughs his exploding laugh. "Everyone on the street
does it, Noorie," he says. "You just have to practise."
Using some tools, Dadu and I screw off the little wheels.





Day 5

AAAAAH!



Day 6

We are *still* not allowed to go out.
“Is this gate getting taller?” I ask
Ammi.

Day 7

"Please! I'm bored at home! I want to go to school! Open the gate! Open it!"

"I'm so sorry Noorie, how I wish I could take you out," says Ammi. "How I wish you never knew these horrors."





Day 8

“Dadu, what is C-U-R-F-E-W?” I ask. Dadu looks uncomfortable. “It’s when the government tells us we should not go out, because it’s not safe on the streets,” he says.

I miss going outside. I miss my friends, I even miss my teachers.

“How long will we have to stay at home?” I ask.

“I don’t know, Noorie,” Dadu says, with a sad sigh.

Grown-ups usually don’t like to say I-don’t-know, so this must be serious. I don’t like seeing Dadu sad, so I stand up. “Okay, enough rest! Come, I have to beat Wasim!”

Day 10

It is Ammi's turn to show me how to brake properly. We practise all afternoon. When Dadu and Nani came out at tea time, I am ready to show off.

Just then, we hear a LOUD noise. Bang! Bang!

People are yelling, "Hum kya chahte?"

I know the next word: Azadi!

My eyes burn. Ammi lifts me up and we run into the house.





In the dining room, we sit close, in a tight circle. Everyone is coughing. "Ammi, what was that?" I ask. Ammi hugs me. "There are people fighting, Noorie." She wipes my eyes. I realise they are watering! Hers are too. "When this happens, you hold your handkerchief against your nose and mouth okay?" Ammi says.

I hug her close. I am tired, and scared. But everyone looks scared.

I remember what Nani said on my first day of cycling.

I have to be brave.

Day 11

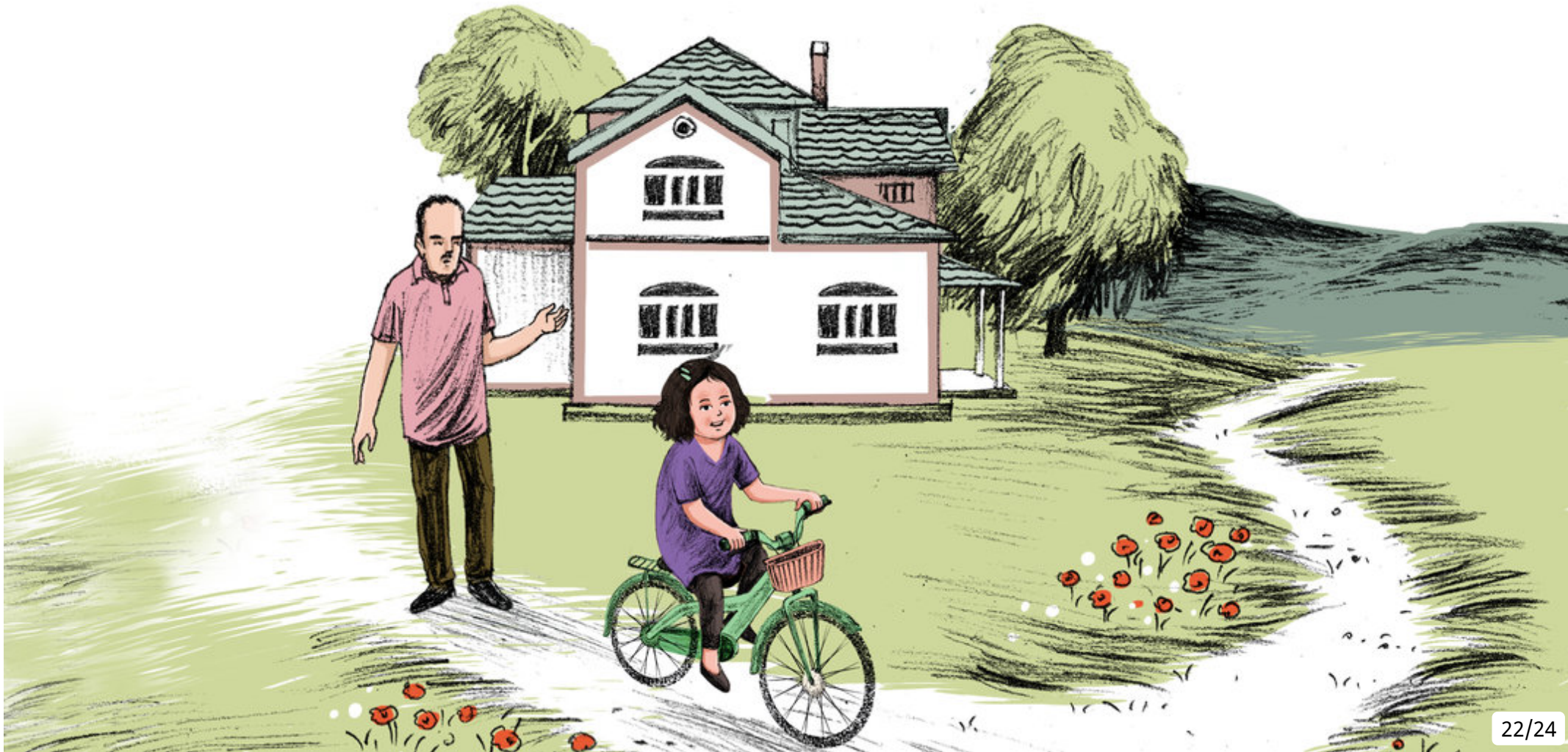
The next morning Abbu wakes me up. "Get up, lazybones. Today I am going to teach you!"

"Is it safe, Abbu?" I ask.

"I promise I'll take care of you if anything happens, okay?" Abbu says. "Now, I hear Wasim is coming back in a few days. Don't you want to be ready for the race?"

As Abbu watches, I cycle just like Dadu, Nani and Ammi taught me.

I learn how to turn! And make an "8" without putting my feet on the ground.





Just as I start getting bored cycling by myself, Wasim returns home. Finally! Abbu tells me the army lifted the CUR-FEW for a few hours, and Wasim's Ammi quickly drove back to Srinagar. Wasim brings an armful of chochow bread. I give him the peach I focused on during Mission Cycle. I am so happy to see that he is safe. "Go bring your cycle, Wasim," I say. Wasim looks sad. "I left it out on the street, and my cycle got bent out of shape during the fighting." Oh! Poor Wasim! How will we do Mission Cycle now?

Wait! I HAVE AN IDEA!

Mission Cycle: Final Day



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Mission Cycle

(English)

Noorain is on a mission to learn cycling so that she can win a race against her best friend Wasim. But Noorain's Mission Cycle gets complicated as conflict escalates in her city.

This is a Level 4 book for children who can read fluently and with confidence.



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