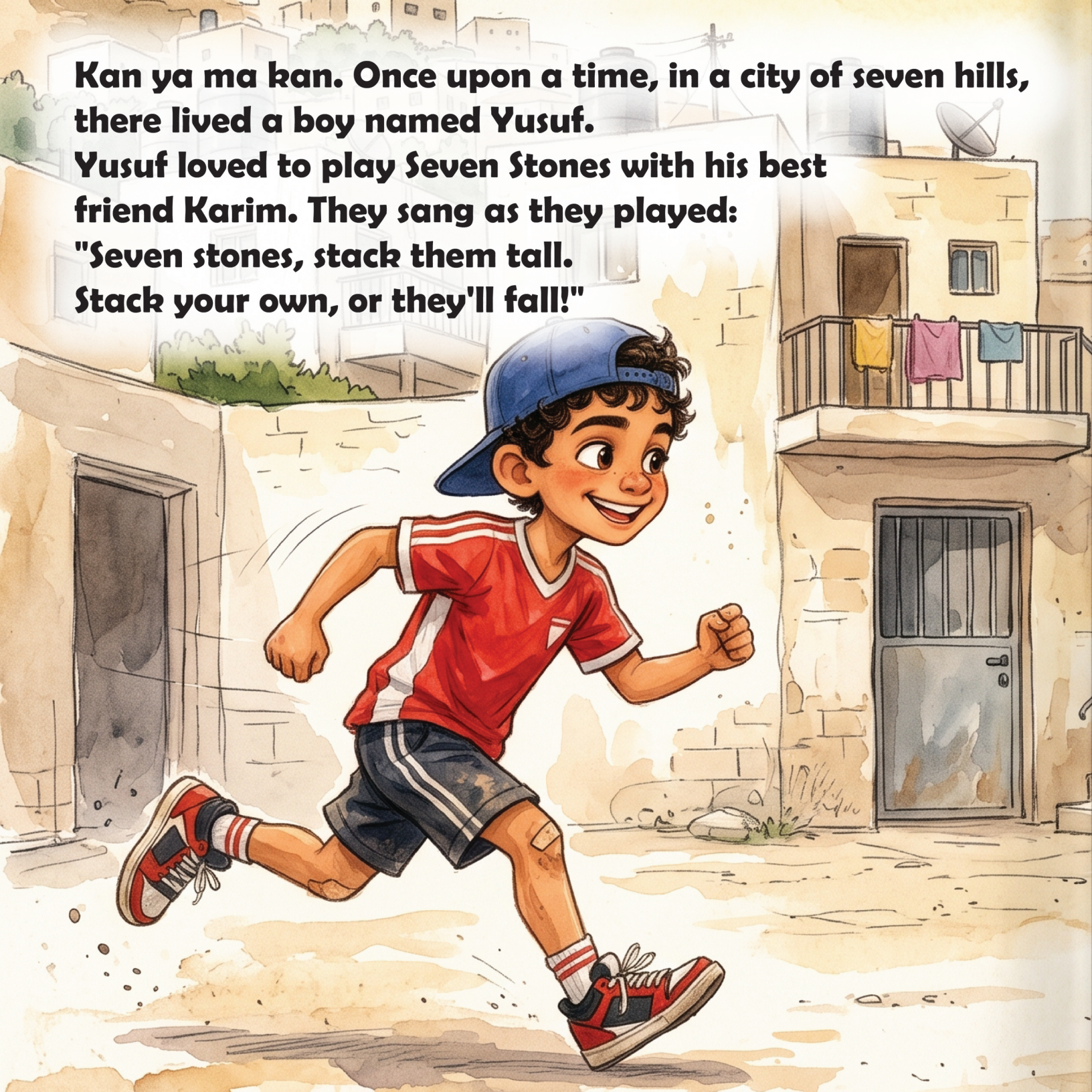
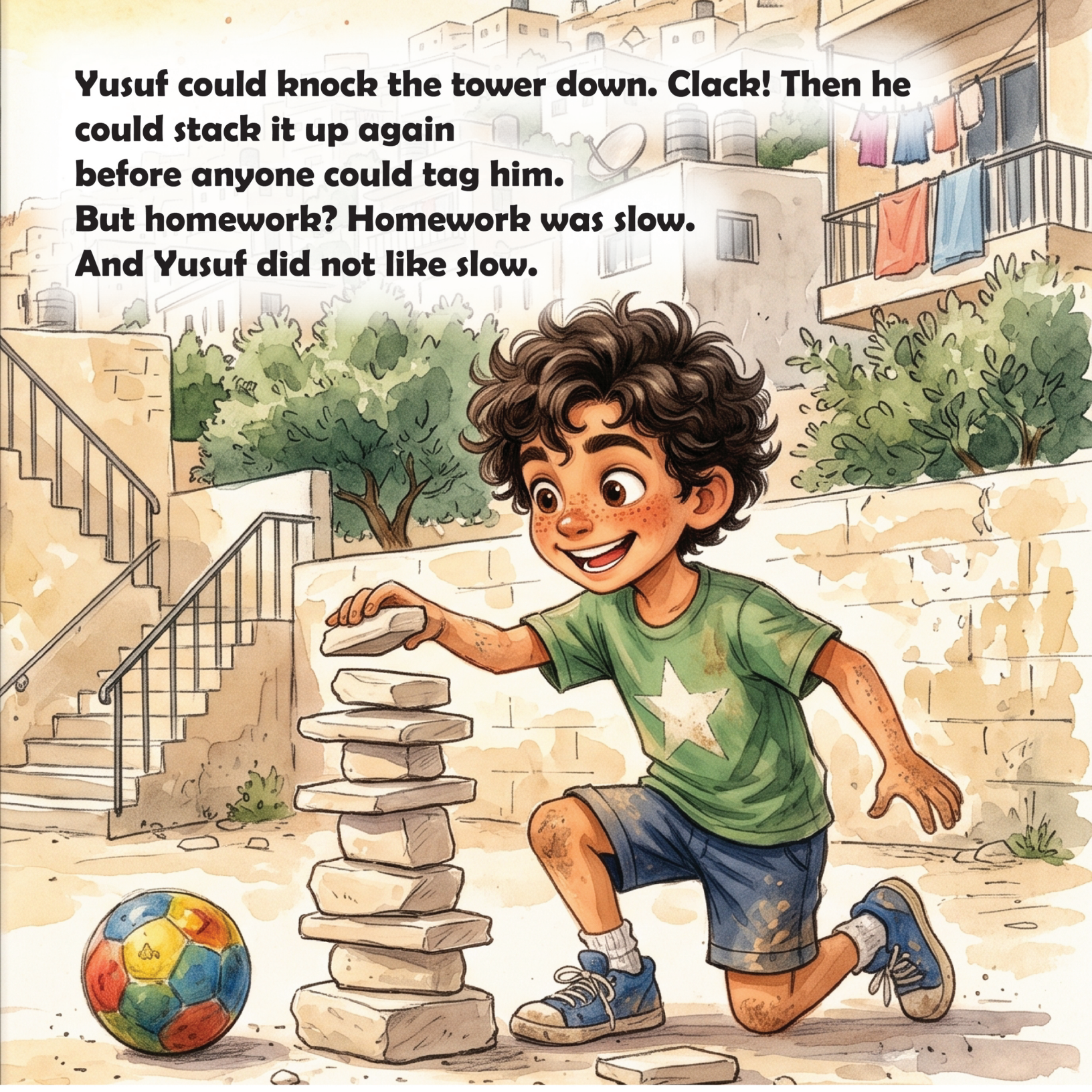
YUSUF CAN'T SINK

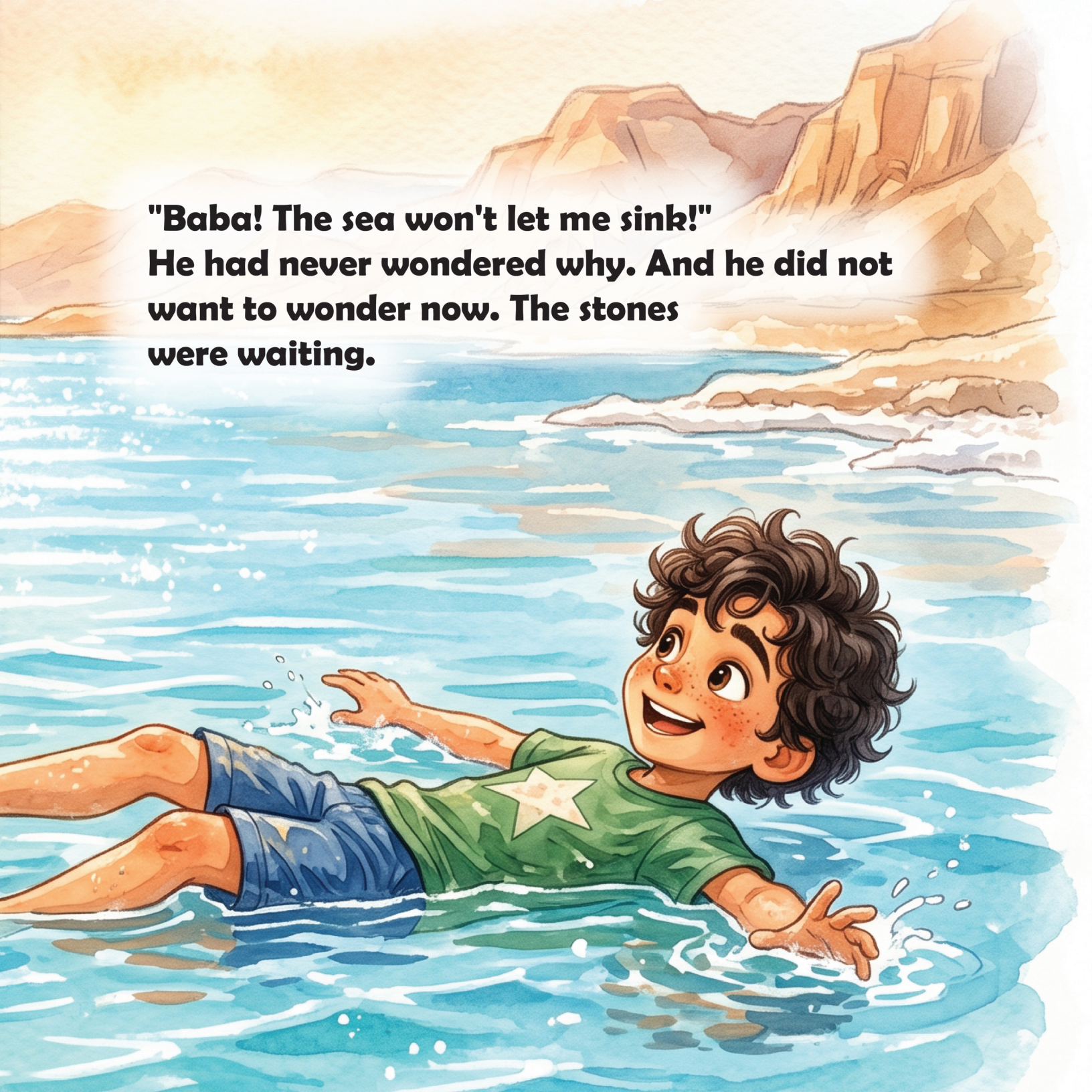



Kan ya ma kan. Once upon a time, in a city of seven hills, there lived a boy named Yusuf.
Yusuf loved to play Seven Stones with his best friend Karim. They sang as they played:
"Seven stones, stack them tall.
Stack your own, or they'll fall!"


Yusuf could knock the tower down. Clack! Then he could stack it up again
before anyone could tag him.
But homework? Homework was slow.
And Yusuf did not like slow.



One day, Ms. Rania gave the class a question to answer at home.
Why do people float in the Dead Sea?
Yusuf remembered last summer. He had tried to sink to the bottom of the Dead
Sea, but he bobbed back up like a beach ball.


"Baba! The sea won't let me sink!"
He had never wondered why. And he did not want to wonder now. The stones were waiting.



At home, Yusuf opened Nuri, the AI helper on the family tablet. The screen lit up. "Marhaba, Yusuf! How can I help you today?" Yusuf thought of the magic lamps in Teta's stories. Maybe this was just like one!



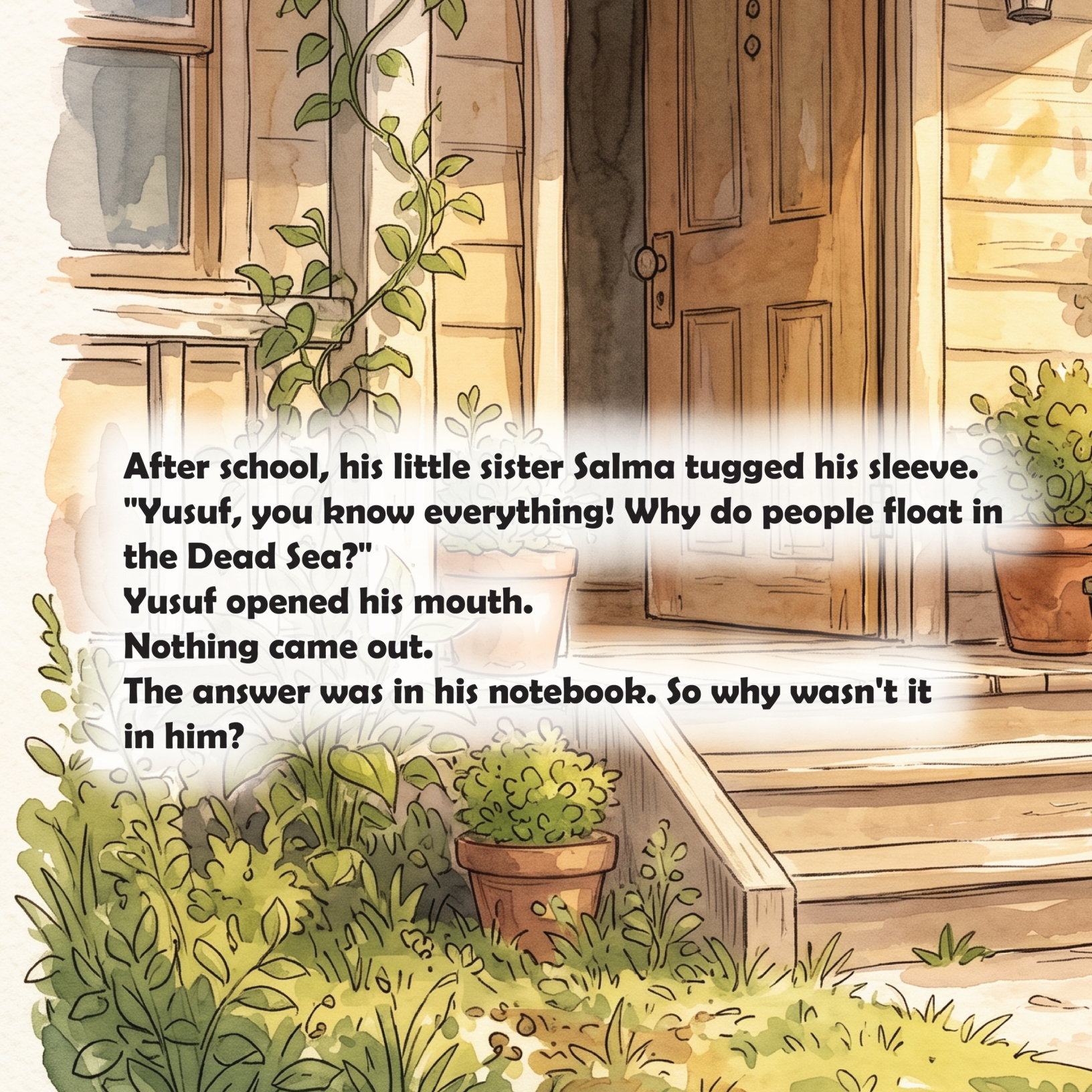
"I wish," he said, "that you would do my homework."
“Why do people float in the Dead Sea?”
WHOOSH! Out poured a long, long answer full of big, shiny words. Yusuf didn't know what they meant. But he copied every word. Then he raced outside. Clack!


That night, Teta turned the big pot of maqluba upside down. Ta-daaa! Out came a tower of rice, eggplant and chicken! Everyone cheered.
"So, habibi," said Teta, "why do people float in the Dead Sea?" Yusuf opened his mouth.


Nothing came out.
"Um... because of a... big word?"
His rice looked back at him.


The next morning, Ms. Rania smiled. "Close your notebook, Yusuf. Why do people float in the Dead Sea?"


The Dead Sea / البحر الميت
Dead Sea
صئر الميت
خطية معد
معد الميت
البحر الميت:
طاب مذاة
JORDAN المعابدل
Yusuf opened his mouth.
Nothing came out.
Somebody giggled.


After school, his little sister Salma tugged his sleeve.
"Yusuf, you know everything! Why do people float in the Dead Sea?"
Yusuf opened his mouth.
Nothing came out.
The answer was in his notebook. So why wasn't it in him?





Yusuf stomped home. "Nuri! Your answer didn't stay!"
"Remember your song?" said Nuri softly. "Stack your own, or they'll fall.
Answers are the same. If I stack them for you, they fall right out of your head."


"Then I wish," said Yusuf, "that you would put the answer inside my head!"
Nuri's screen flickered.
"I'm sorry, Yusuf. I can't do that. Nobody can. Only you can put an answer inside your head."


Yusuf flopped onto the rug.
He thought.
And thought.
And thought.
Then he sat up.


"Then I wish... that you would help me find it myself."
"Now that I can help with!" said Nuri. And its screen glowed brighter than ever before.


"First," said Nuri, "what do you think?"
Yusuf scrunched up his nose. "Maybe salt makes the water heavy? And heavy water pushes?"





"Good thinking! Now, where are you stuck?"
"I don't know how pushing makes you float."
"Aha!" said Nuri. "Then you don't need an answer.
You need an egg."

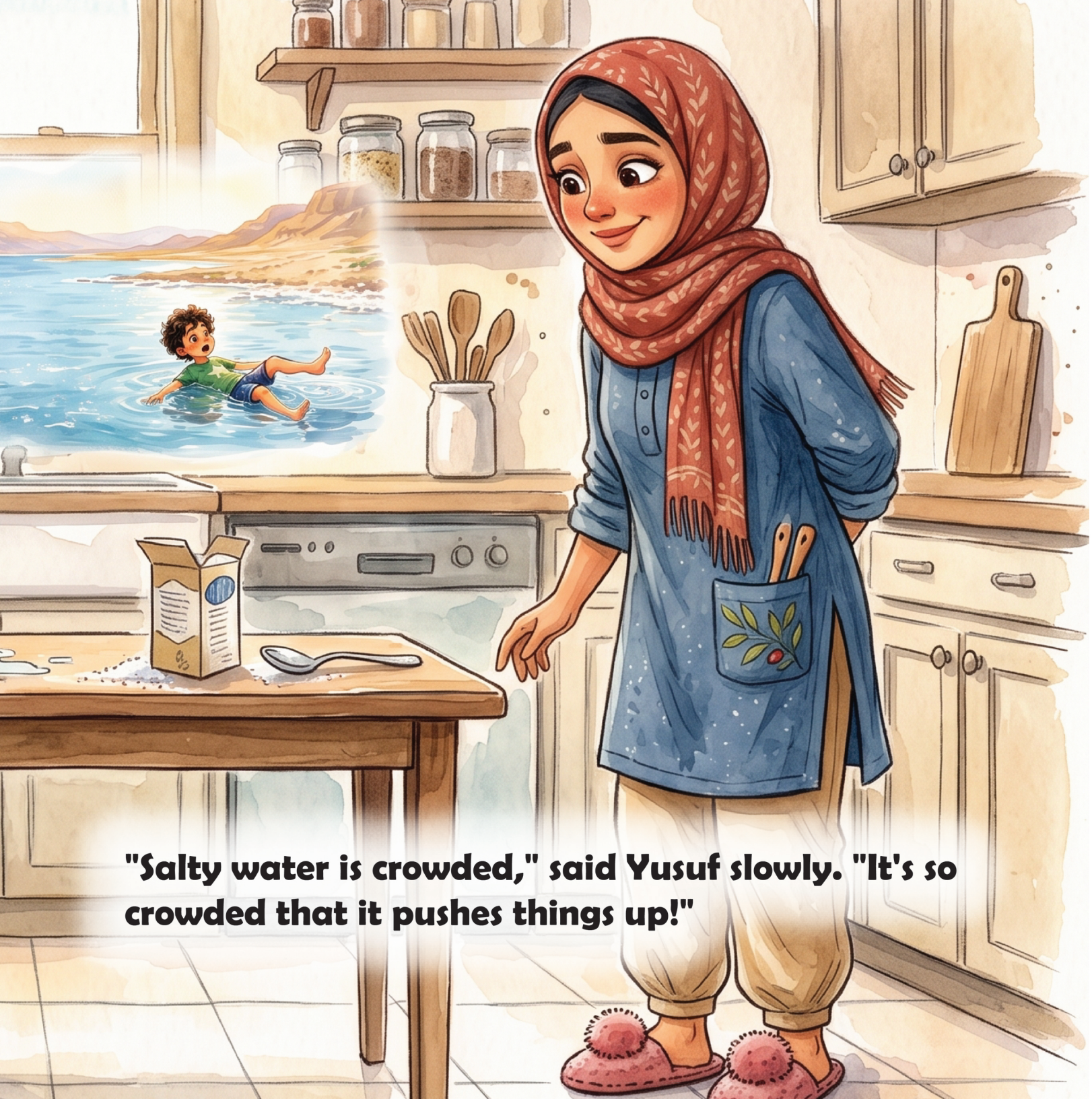




Plop! The egg sank to the bottom of the glass.
"Now add salt," said Nuri.
Salma added salt. Lots of salt. She stirred and stirred and stirred...


SPLOOSH! Salty water splashed onto Mama's slippers.
"YUSUF!"


One more spoon.
The egg wobbled.
The egg wiggled.
The egg... FLOATED!
"It's YOU at the Dead Sea!" squealed Salma.



"Salty water is crowded," said Yusuf slowly. "It's so crowded that it pushes things up!"


"Now test me," said Yusuf.
Nuri asked three questions. Yusuf got one wrong.
He thought again and got it right.


It was late now. His eyes were heavy. His pen was heavy.
For just a moment, he almost made one more wish...


...but he picked up his pen instead.
"Stack your own," he whispered.
He wrote it all by himself.

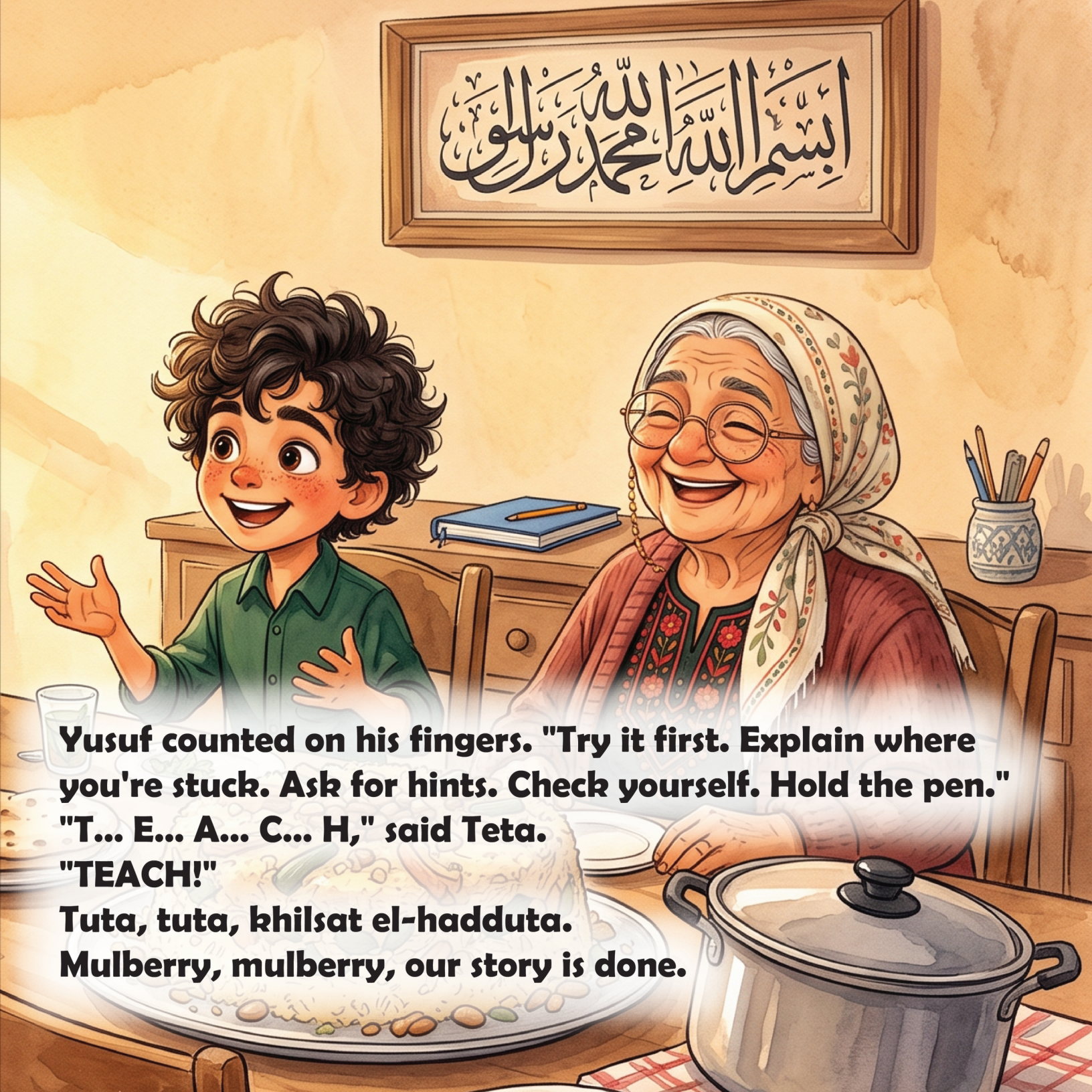

There were crossed-out words and one wobbly egg.
It wasn't shiny.
But this time, every word stayed.


The next day, Ms. Rania asked again.
Yusuf opened his mouth...
and the answer came out! He showed the whole class with an egg and a glass,
and no notes at all.



After school, Karim ran up to him. "Yusuf, my homework makes no sense! Can you just tell me the answer?"
Yusuf grinned.
"I can do better than that. I'll show you how to find it."


On Friday, Teta let Yusuf help flip the maqluba pot.
Ta-daaa! "So, habibi," said Teta, "why do people float in the Dead Sea?"
Yusuf opened his mouth...
and he talked and talked
until his tea went cold.
"Look at you,"
Teta laughed. "Now you
are the teacher!"



Yusuf counted on his fingers. "Try it first. Explain where you're stuck. Ask for hints. Check yourself. Hold the pen."

"T... E... A... C... H," said Teta.

"TEACH!"

Tuta, tuta, khilsat el-hadduta.

Mulberry, mulberry, our story is done.

Author's Note

The answer took three seconds. The understanding never came. I once watched a child ask an AI a homework question and copy the answer perfectly, word for word. Then someone asked, "So what does it mean?" Silence. That silence is why I wrote this book. In 2026, the United Arab Emirates celebrated Emirati Children's Day under the theme "The Right to Digital Knowledge." It is a powerful idea. But knowledge is not something a machine can hand to a child. It is something a child builds, one stone at a time. Our children will never know a world without AI. We cannot keep it from them, and we shouldn't try. What we can do is teach them to use it well. To try first, to ask good questions, to check their thinking, and to hold the pen themselves.

Yusuf lives in Amman, but he could live in Abu Dhabi, Cairo, or anywhere a child rushes through homework to get back outside to play. This story is for every child who has copied an answer and wondered why it didn't stay. And it is for every parent, grandparent and teacher who has asked, at a dinner table or a school desk, "But why, Habibi?"

Read it together. Float the egg. Ask the questions.

Every child has the right to digital knowledge. And every child can learn to make it their own.

