

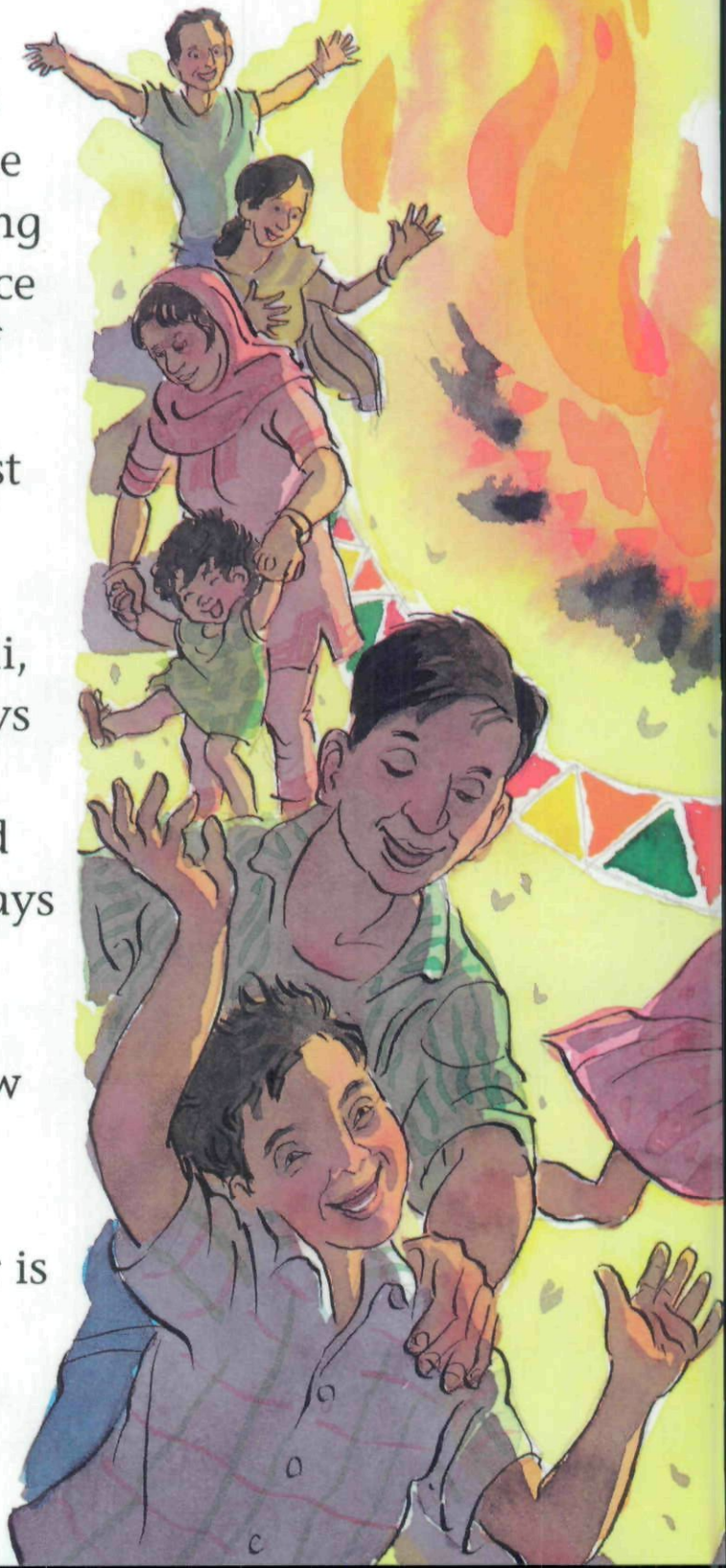


# Holi

I'm Sanjay, and my parents don't usually let me stay out this late. I'm dragging a broken board from our fence to throw on that huge pile of sticks and fallen branches. I think we will have the biggest bonfire ever in our town in northern India.

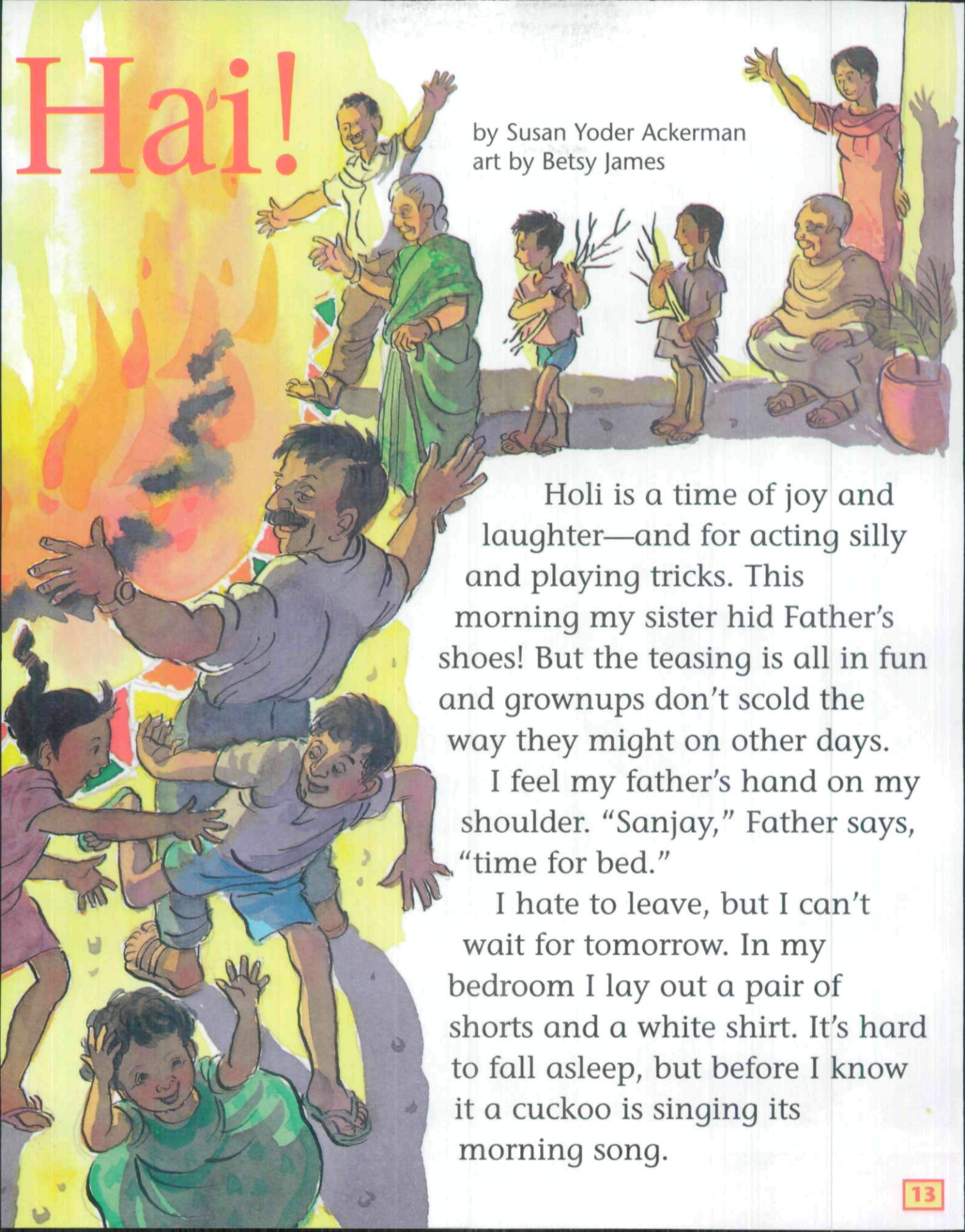
It's spring and time for Holi, the Festival of Colors. For days we've been cleaning house. Father painted the walls, and Mother decorated the doorways with flowery designs.

Whoosh! The bonfire is lit. It's hot! I step back to see how high the flames shoot up. Everyone is singing and dancing. We're happy winter is over and spring has come again, bringing new life and beautiful colors to our land.



# Hai!

by Susan Yoder Ackerman  
art by Betsy James

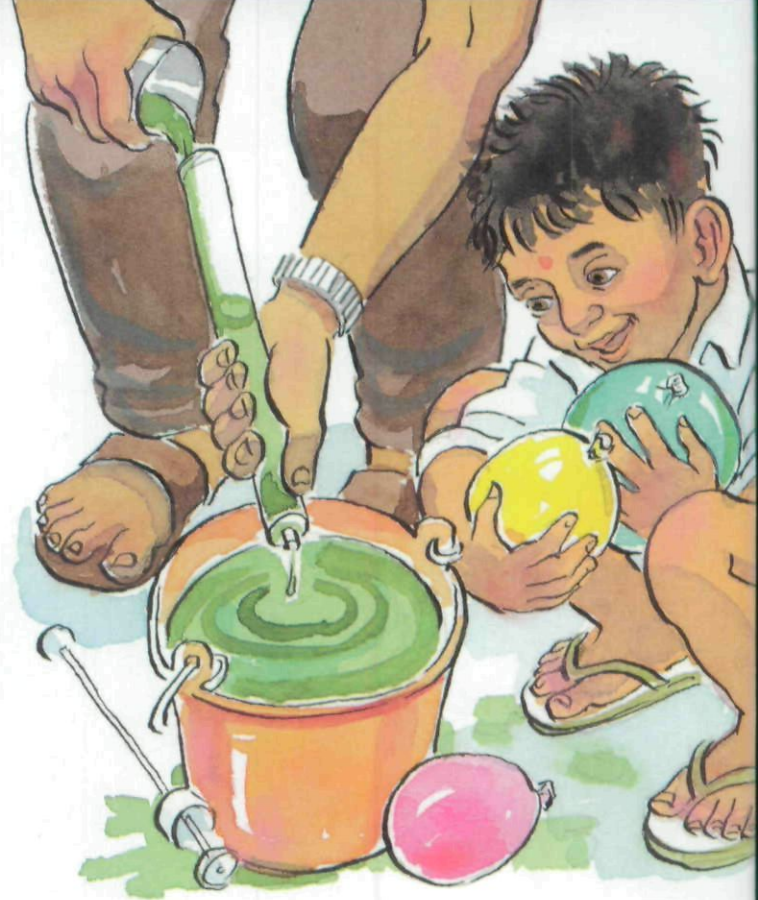


Holi is a time of joy and laughter—and for acting silly and playing tricks. This morning my sister hid Father's shoes! But the teasing is all in fun and grownups don't scold the way they might on other days.

I feel my father's hand on my shoulder. "Sanjay," Father says, "time for bed."

I hate to leave, but I can't wait for tomorrow. In my bedroom I lay out a pair of shorts and a white shirt. It's hard to fall asleep, but before I know it a cuckoo is singing its morning song.

“Holi hai!” Mother calls. “It’s Holi!” She gives me a plate of jackfruit for breakfast, and lays out the bags of paint powder she bought in the market yesterday—red, green, blue, pink, black, silver, purple! The powder is called *gula*. My father mixes it with water and pours some into a *pichkari*, or squirter. I fill some balloons.



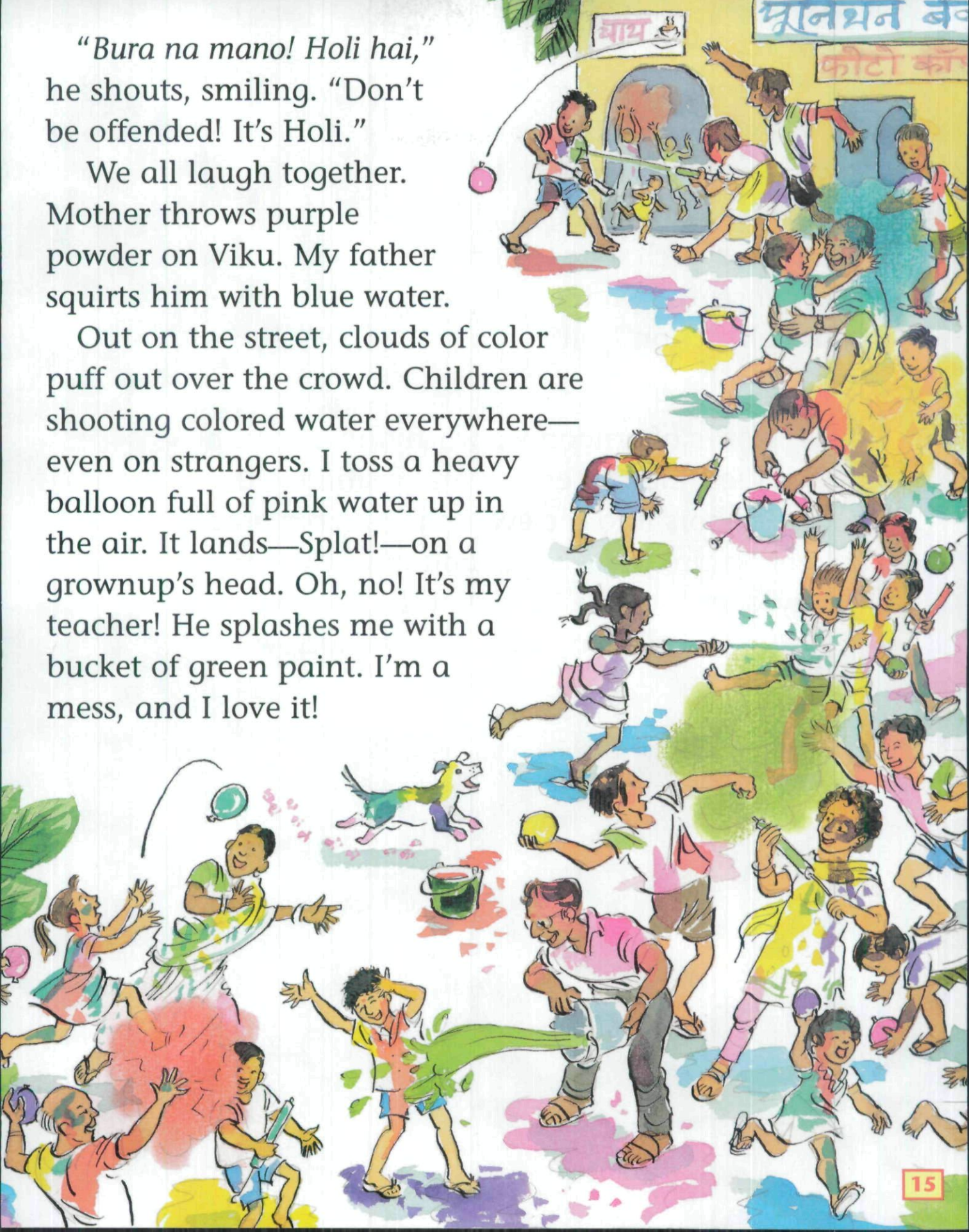
There’s a knock at the door. It’s Viku. I’m surprised. He goes to a different school and never comes to play at my house. But on Holi everyone’s a friend. Viku has brought us a tray of *gujiya*. The pastries look like half moons and smell wonderful. They’re filled with dried fruits and nuts.

I thank Viku, but then—he pulls out a *pichkari* and squirts me! I’m dripping red all down my clean, white shirt.

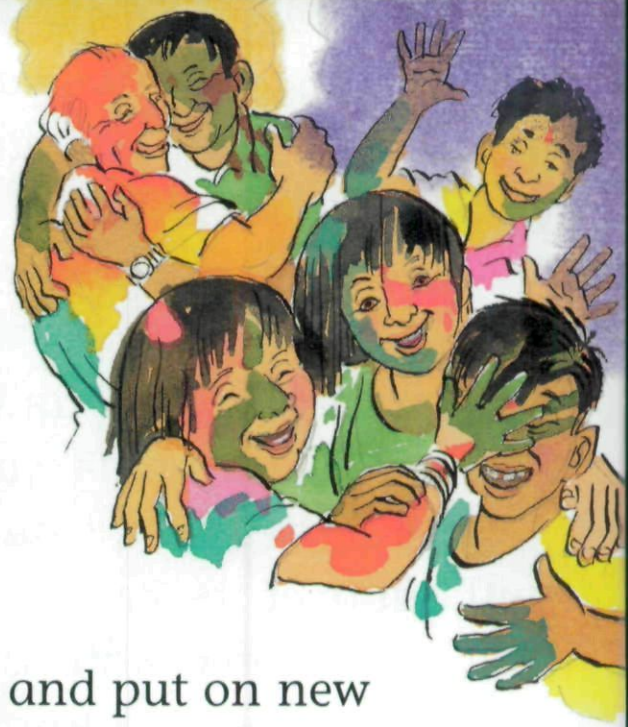
*"Bura na mano! Holi hai,"* he shouts, smiling. "Don't be offended! It's Holi."

We all laugh together. Mother throws purple powder on Viku. My father squirts him with blue water.

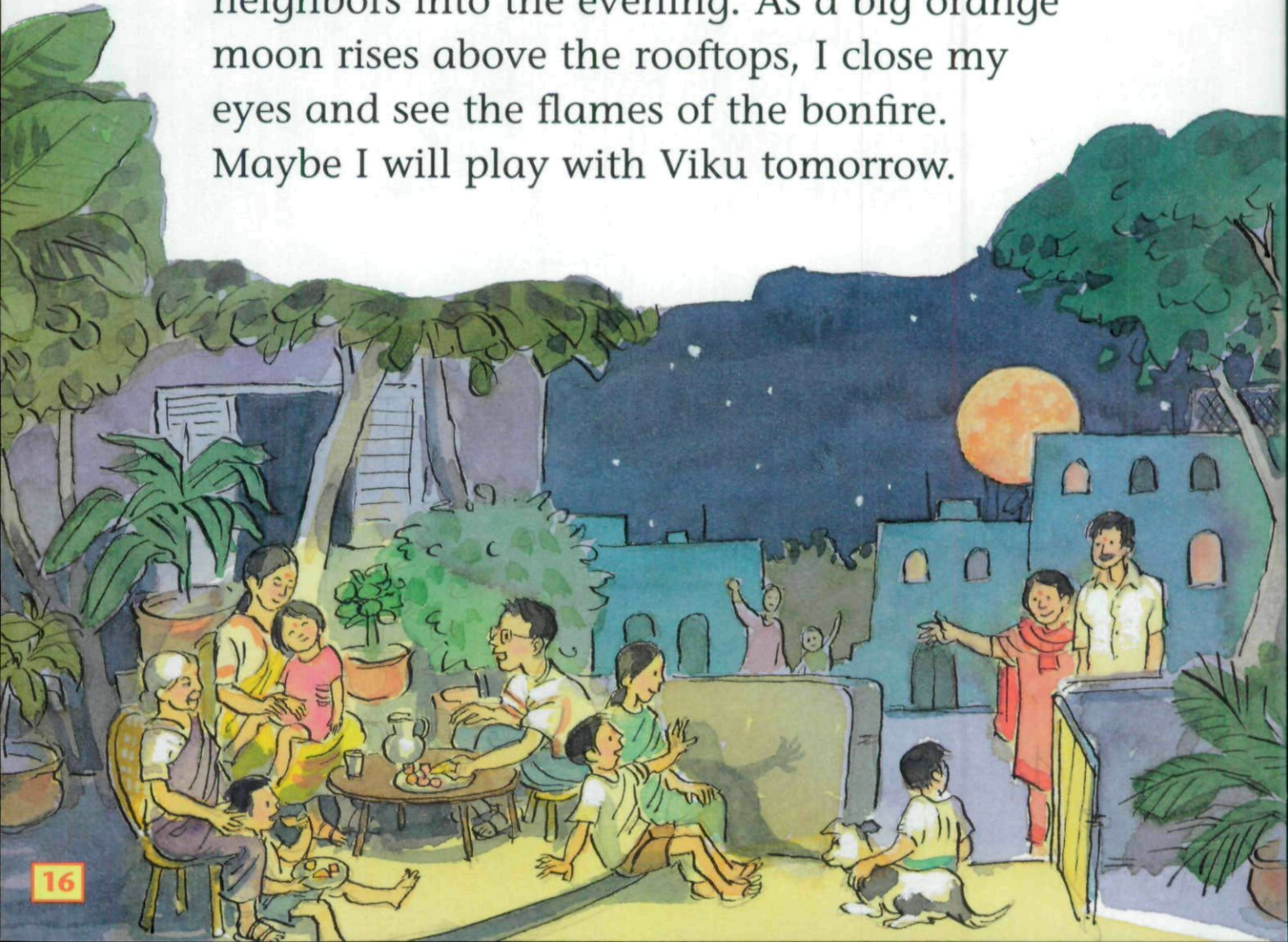
Out on the street, clouds of color puff out over the crowd. Children are shooting colored water everywhere—even on strangers. I toss a heavy balloon full of pink water up in the air. It lands—Splat!—on a grownup's head. Oh, no! It's my teacher! He splashes me with a bucket of green paint. I'm a mess, and I love it!



We throw paint all morning, until the people, the streets, and the houses are drenched with every color of the rainbow. I see men covered with paint laughing and hugging each other. Everyone makes peace and promises to be good neighbors on Holi.



In the afternoon we wash and put on new clothes, then sit eating and visiting with neighbors into the evening. As a big orange moon rises above the rooftops, I close my eyes and see the flames of the bonfire. Maybe I will play with Viku tomorrow.



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