



The Case of the Missing Water

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Level 4



The tank in Ranj's village was almost dry. Aji began to pray for rain. Amma collected all the buckets and pots and vessels in the house and filled them up.

"We need to store as much water as we can," she said.

Appa collected tools to dig a little deeper. "We just need enough until the rains arrive," he said.



Ranj got out her notebook and pencil. She put on her thinking cap, and followed her parents to the tank. She examined the tank bed closely. It was cracked and dusty.

Ranj wondered, "Where did the water in the tank go? Did it run away? Was it stolen? This is a mystery!"



Ranj loved solving mysteries: Like the time Ajji couldn't find her reading glasses.

Ranj had found them in her book, marking the page she was reading.

Then the other time — Why were elephants visiting the ragi fields? Turns out it was because their long, long trunks could smell the ripening grains, all ready to eat.

"I'll find that water," Ranj muttered to herself.

Ranj walked to the other side of the tank, past dead fish and dried reeds.

“Do you know where the water could have gone?” Ranj asked a fisherman.

“Downstream?” the fisherman suggested.



Ranj followed the dry stream bed down the hill. At the bottom was another tank. It had lots of goats, but no water.

Ranj asked the goatherd, "Do you know where the water might be?"

"Upstream," the goatherd suggested.

"That's where I came from," Ranj said. "No water there."

"Further up, then?" the goatherd said. "That's where your water comes from."





Ranj climbed up to the tank. Then she climbed up some more to a tank further up the hill. There was no water, no birds. There was only one person there.

“Sapna, I can’t find any water. Any idea where it’s gone?” Ranj called to her. She knew Sapna from school.



“Downstream,” Sapna called back.

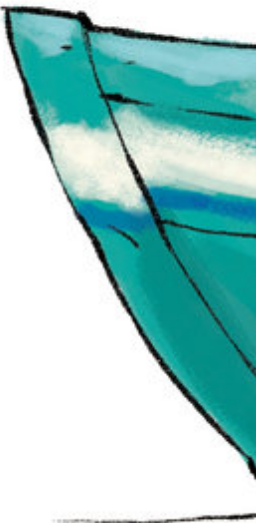
Ranj was suddenly angry. She stomped her foot.

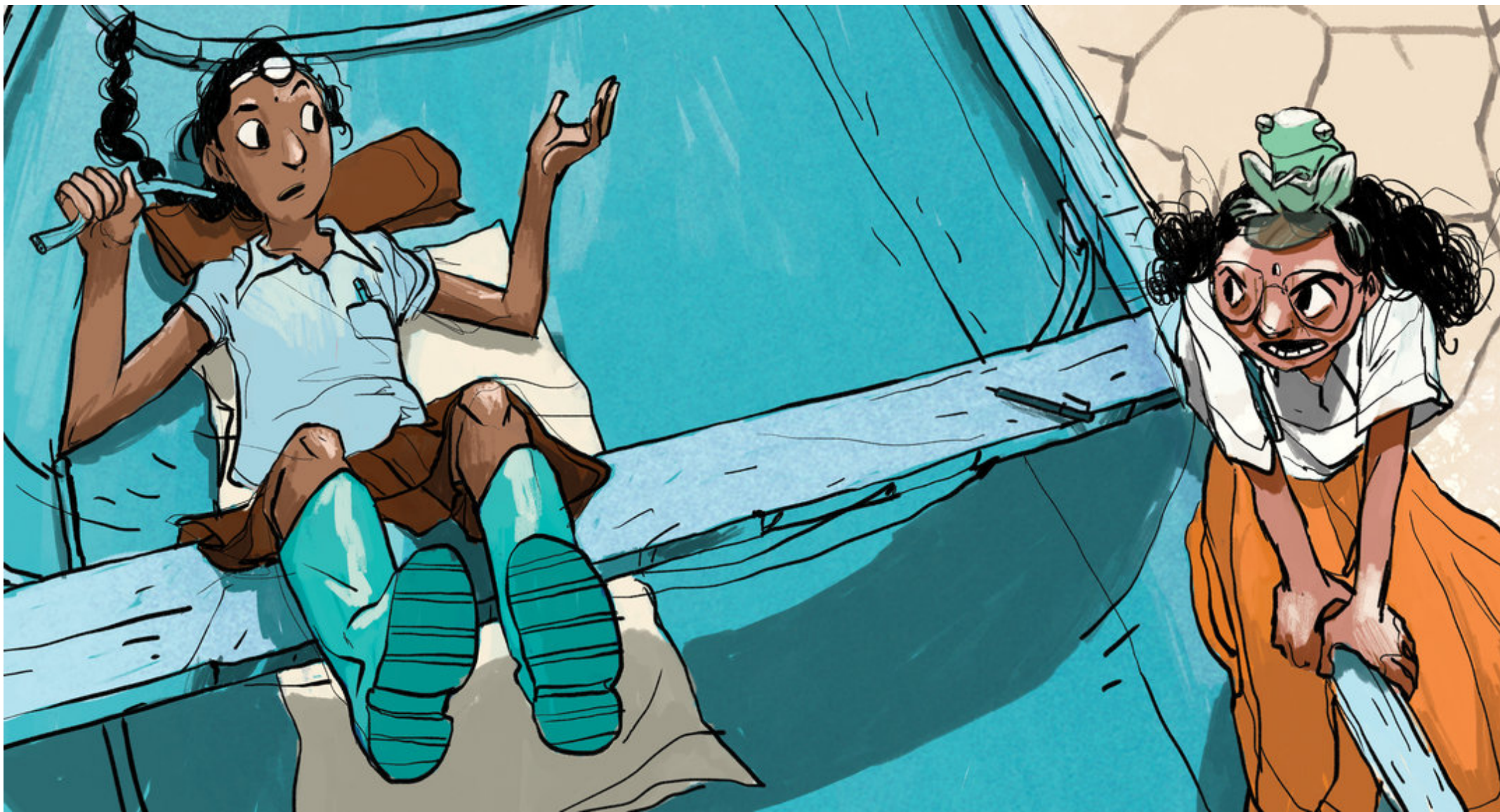
“NO!” she shouted. “It’s not. I have searched and searched. It’s not upstream or downstream. Got it?”

“How about up there?” Sapna suggested.

Ranj and Sapna looked up at the sky. The sun glared back at them. Everything was white-hot and dusty.

“No,” they agreed together. “No water there.”





Ranj collapsed into the boat with Sapna and gnawed on a lotus stem. She was hot and tired.

"Manju's parents left the village," Ranj said. "They went to the city where they have water. Maybe we should all go."

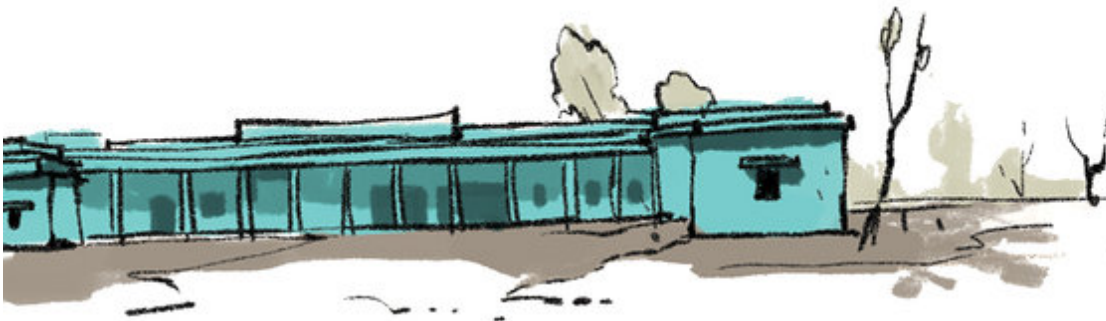
"You go," Sapna snapped. "No one asked you to be here."

"Fine," Ranj said. And she stomped back home.
But it wasn't fine! There was still no water, still no rain.

The next day, Ranj brushed her teeth with muddy tank water in a tiny glass.

"Thooo!" she spat.

In school, the class was half-empty. More families had left the area.



Ranj just couldn't bear it. She missed all her friends!

In the middle of Environmental Studies class, she turned and ran out of school.



She ran and ran until she was panting. She finally sat at the side of the road.

"I have to find the water!" she huffed.

"Can I help?" said a voice. It was Sapna who had seen Ranj running away from school.

Ranj beamed. "Yes!"

"We have to do this properly," Sapna said. "Like real Sanitary Engineers."

"Like who...?" Ranj asked.

"Sanitary Engineers build pipes and tanks and drains. I am going to be one when I grow up," Sapna said.

Ranj and Sapna decided to draw a map of their village and all its tanks and streams, showing all the places where the water might have flowed.



Where could the water possibly have gone?

Finally, they sat back and pored over the map. “We haven’t seen that tank yet,” Ranj pointed to one of the tanks they had drawn.

“Let’s go,” Sapna agreed.

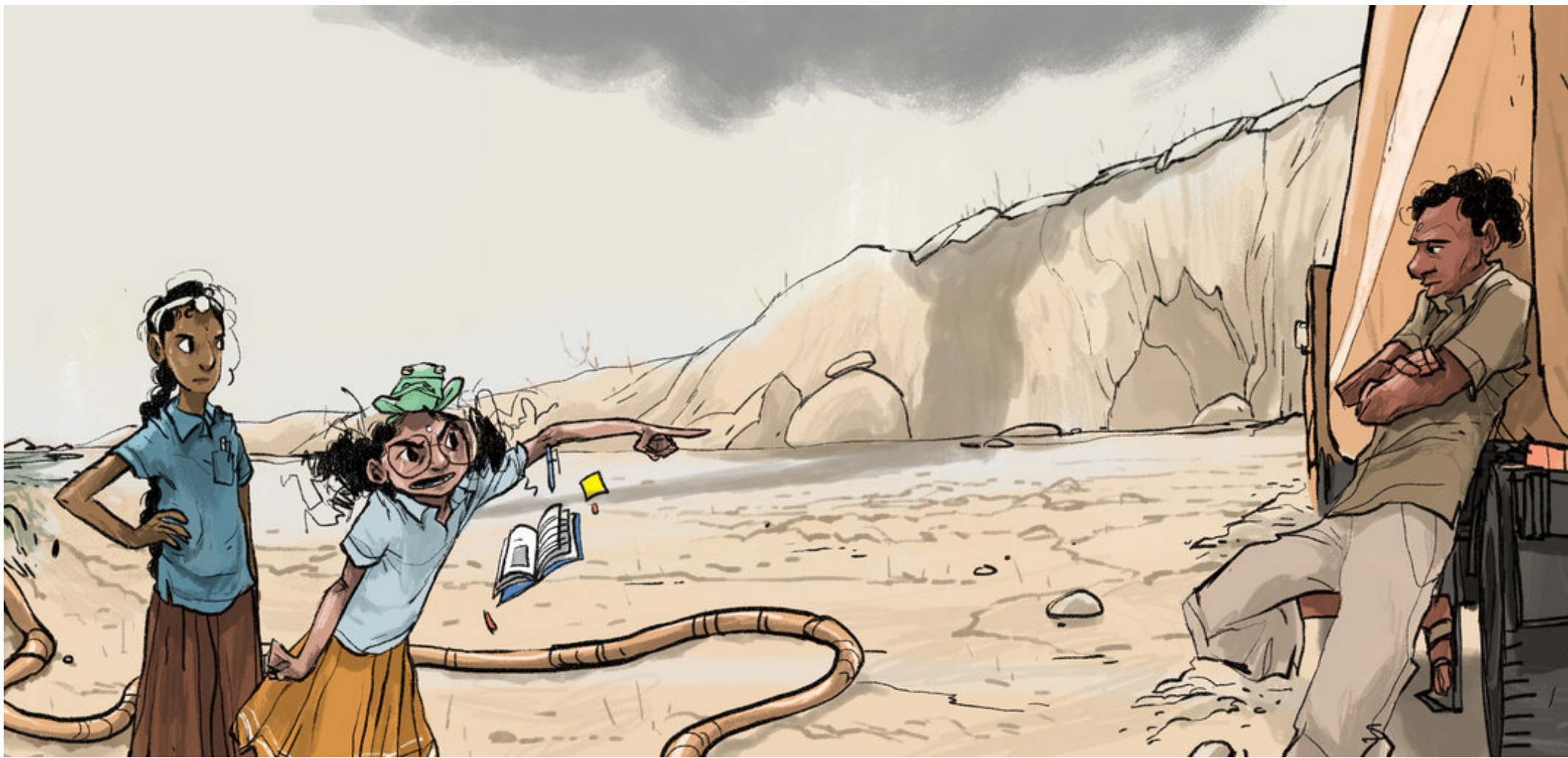
Ranj and Sapna began climbing up the hill. The stream here was dry as well.

“Maybe we shouldn’t have missed school. This tank is probably dry as well,” Sapna said sadly.



When they reached the tank, Ranj and Sapna realised they were wrong.

This tank was full!



Sapna pointed at a small pump at the end of the lake. There was a tanker just below the bund, collecting water as it flowed. A man stood by, guiding the tanker.

“Mystery solved,” Ranj spat. She had never felt so angry after solving a mystery.

“Where are you taking our water?” Ranj wanted to know.

“The city,” the man said. “They have more people, so they need more water.”

“That’s not fair!” Sapna said.

The man shrugged, “That’s how it is.”

“My friend is a Sanitary Engineer,” Ranj yelled. “She knows what’s fair.”

The man laughed. “Sanitary Engineer it seems! You’re just children!”

Sapna said quietly, “Yes, but I know you can’t just take our water away.”

“Go home,” the man said. “You can’t change anything!”

“We’ll break your pump!” Ranj shouted, running at the pump with a stick.

“Oho!” said the man. “Shouldn’t Sanitary Engineers be building pumps, not breaking them?”

“Yes... no... not like this...” Sapna said, unhappily.

But Ranj said, “I’m a detective! I can do what I want.”

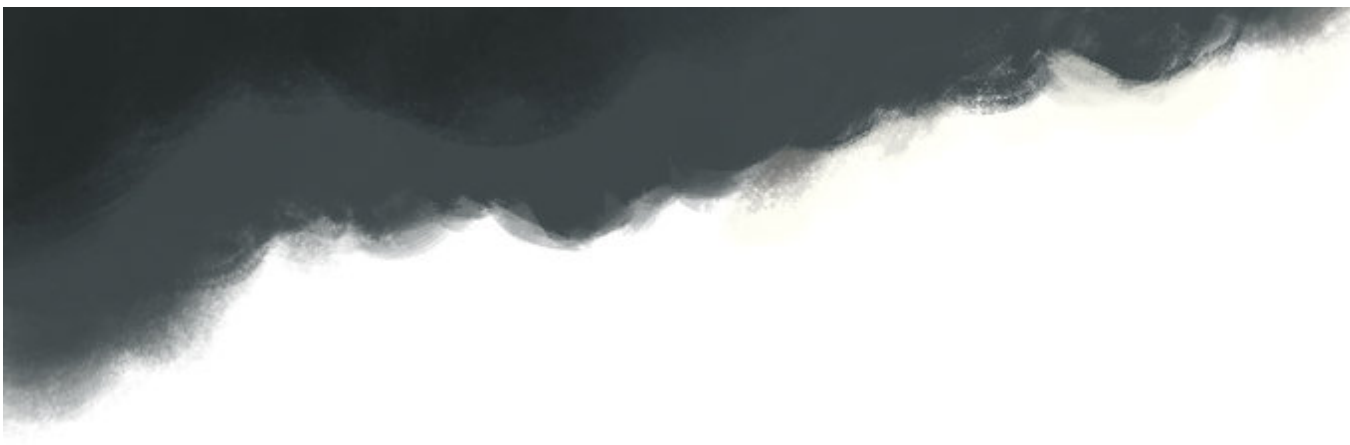




Ranj had a better idea. She hugged the pump. "You can't turn it on now!"

Sapna ran up to hug the pump too.

"Hey!" said the man. Now he was really angry. "Just go home," he said.

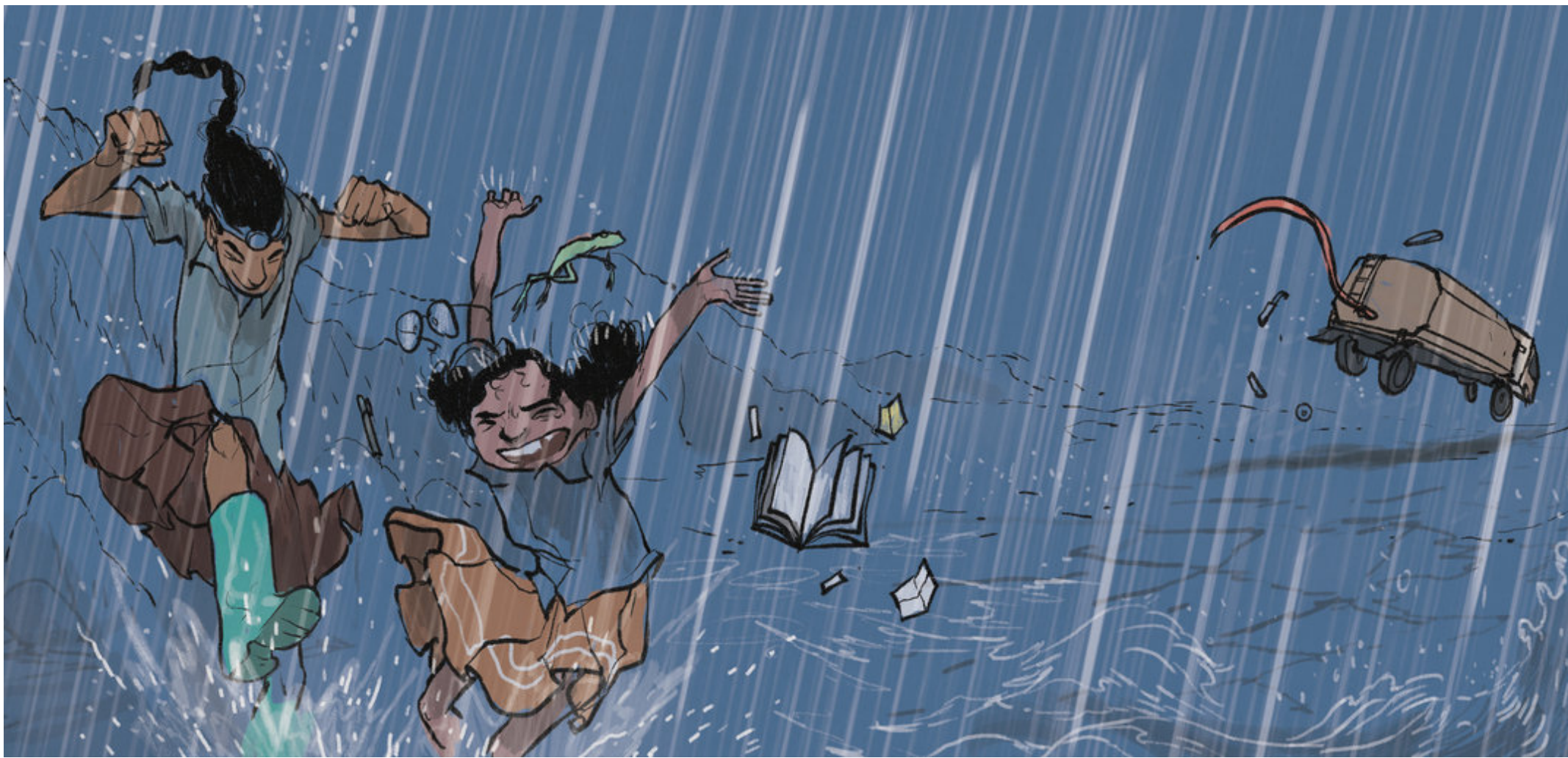


That was when the clouds broke. Thunder roared, lightning slashed, rain poured. Sapna started to laugh.

“The monsoon is here!” Ranj shouted.

“I’m going home, even if you aren’t,” the tanker man said.

It rained and rained.



WOOSH, the bund overflowed, and the stream rushed down, splashing them.

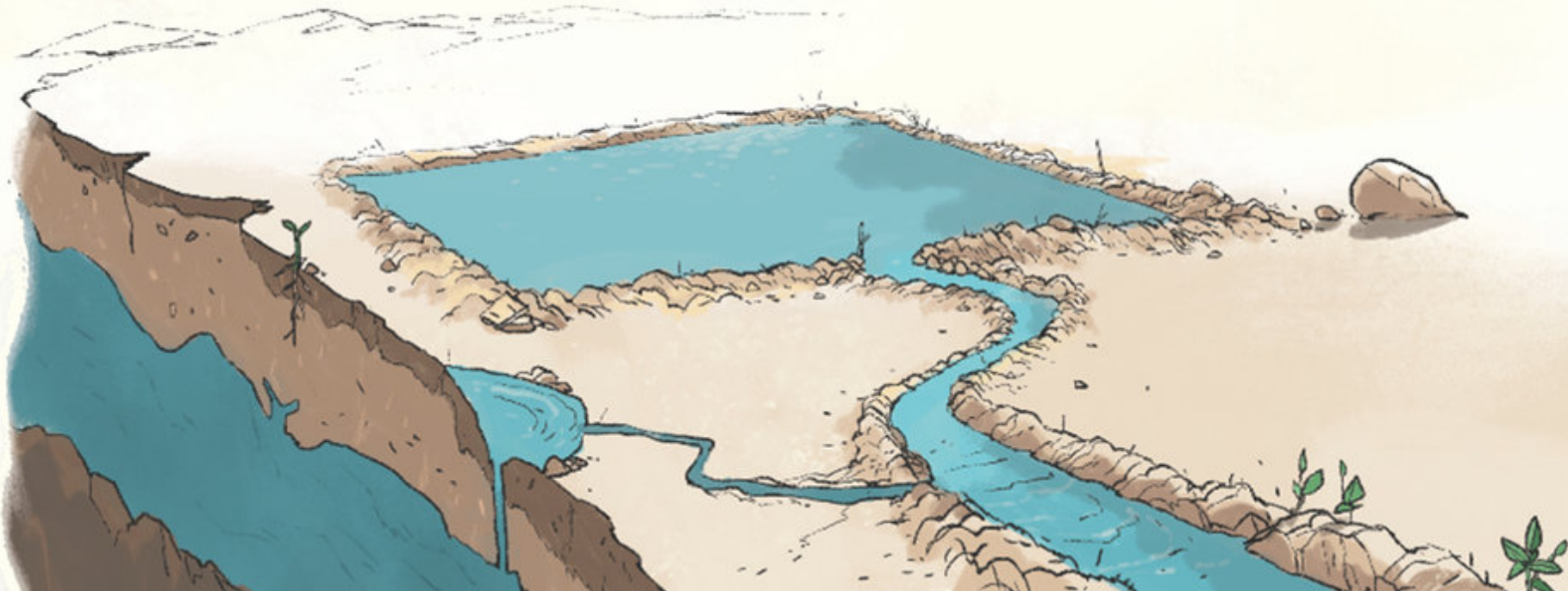
“The water has been found! Mystery solved!” Ranj said.

“WOOOOOO!” They yowled with joy.

Water Words

Tank: A name for a man-made place to collect water. Tank sizes can vary from small pools to large lakes.

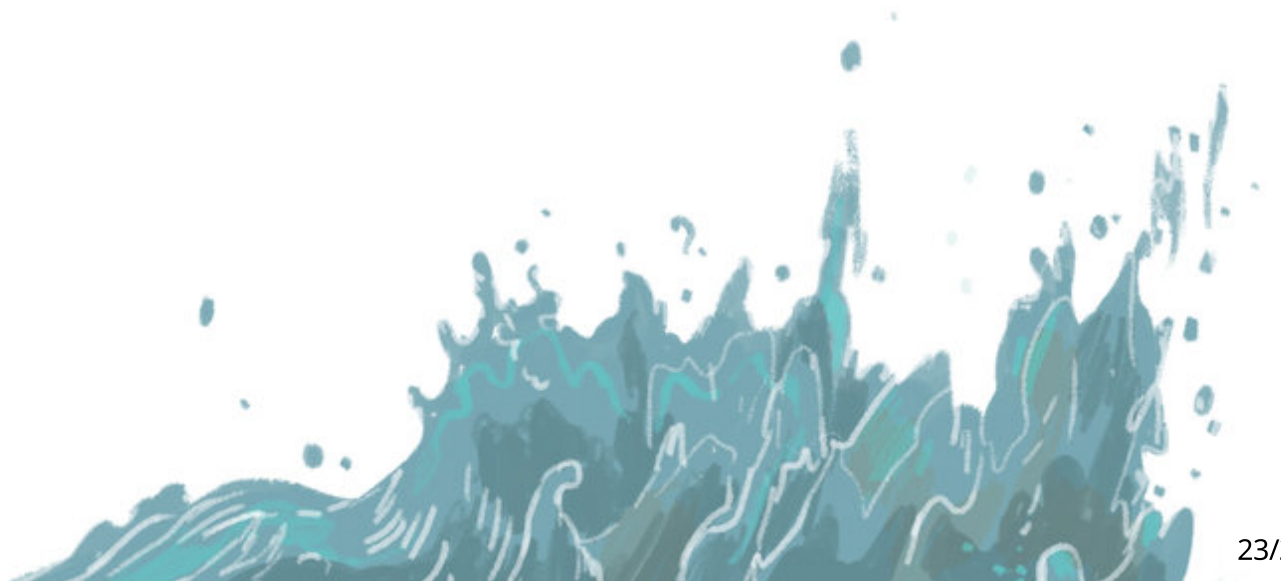
Bund: A small wall – usually made of mud or stones – to stop and hold water in a tank.



Stream: A small channel through which water flows.

Spring: A place where underground water comes up to the surface.

Water table: Level of water under the ground. Wells have to be dug deep enough to hit the water table to get water.



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The Case of the Missing Water

(English)

When the tank in Ranj's village dries up, she sets out on a mission to find the missing water. Join Detective Ranj on the case.

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



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