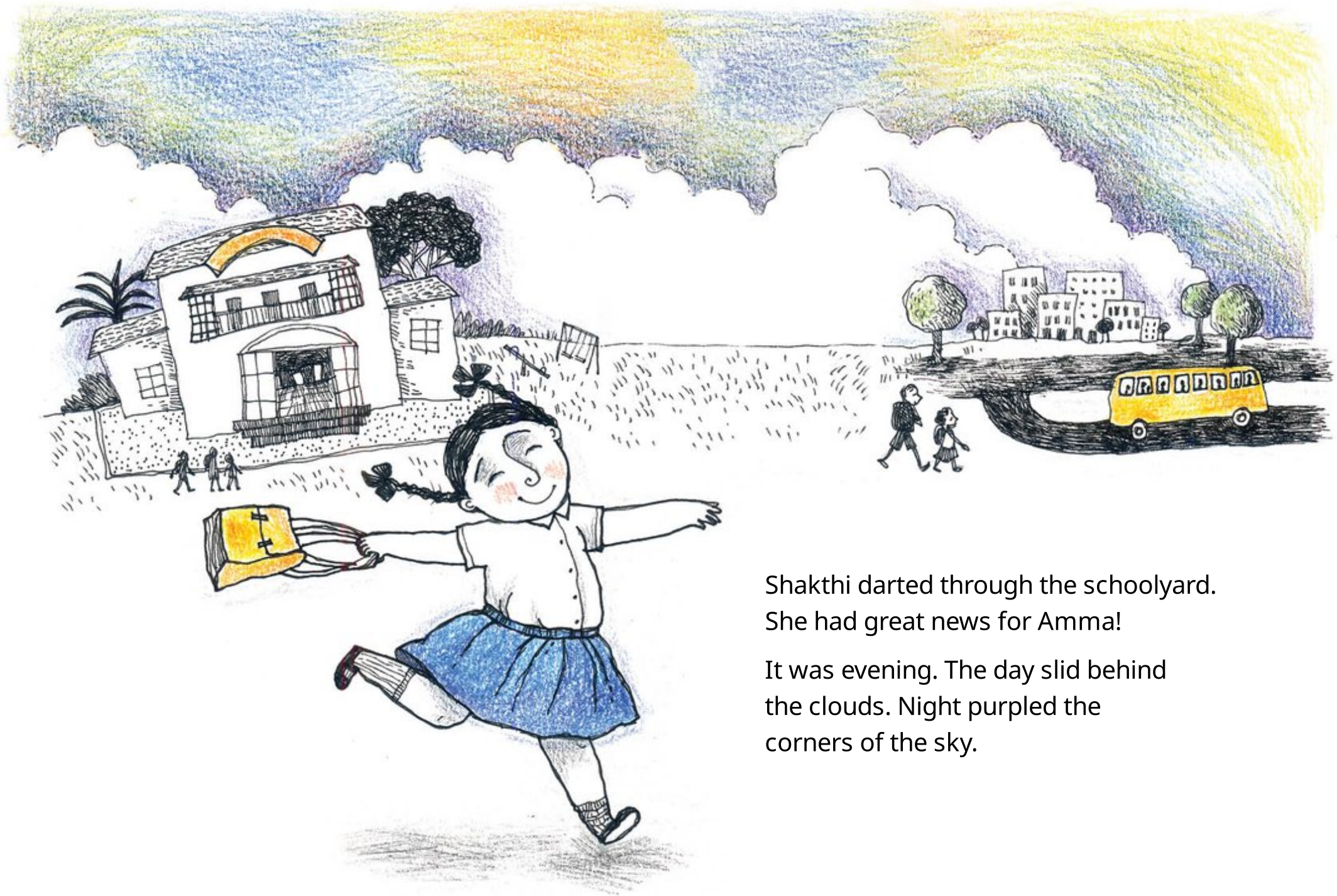


Full of Light

Author: Mathangi Subramanian

Illustrator: Proiti Roy

Level 4



Shakthi darted through the schoolyard.
She had great news for Amma!

It was evening. The day slid behind
the clouds. Night purpled the
corners of the sky.



Shakthi burst into her house.

"Amma," she yelled, "I won the art competition!"

"Always so loud," Amma said, wrinkling her nose. She was filling a brass lamp with oil. She shook her head. She sucked her teeth. She didn't look up.

In a quieter voice, Shakthi said, "Sorry. But I got a medal. See?"

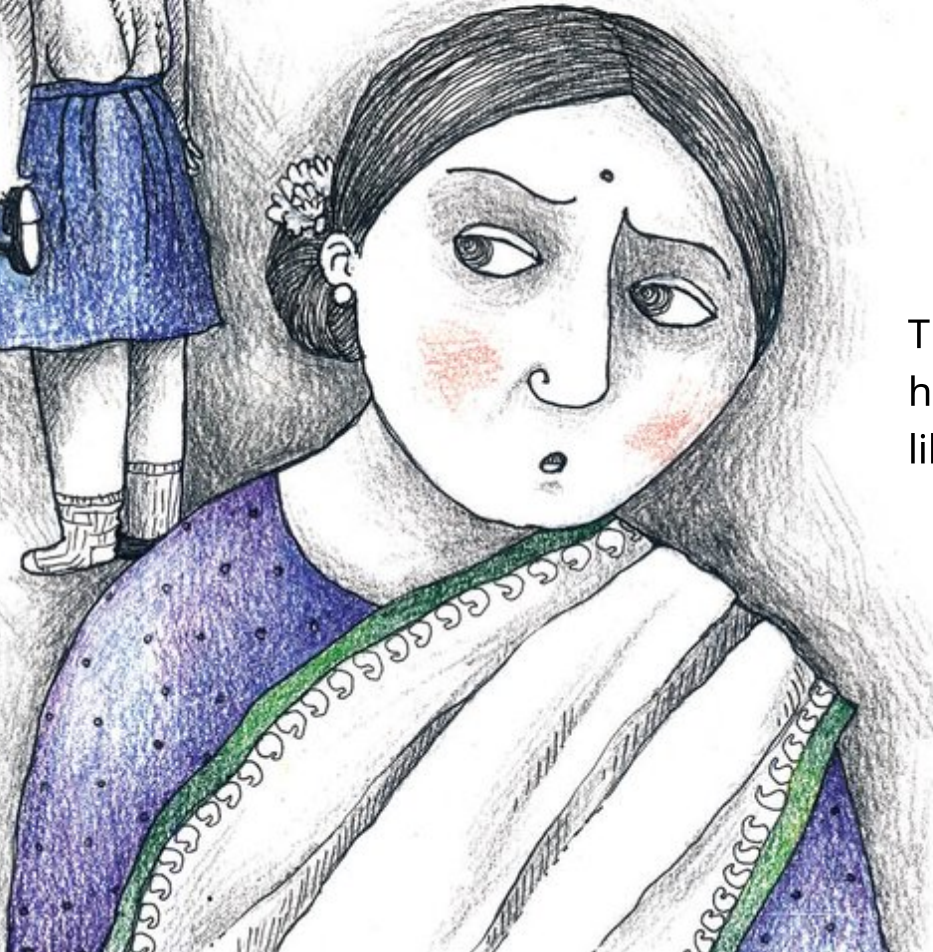


Amma turned to Shakthi. But she didn't notice the award. She noticed Shakthi's uniform.

"Another pocket stain?" Amma asked, rolling her eyes. Turning back to the lamp, she muttered, "This child. Sure, she struggles with marks. But can't she at least stay clean?"



Then Amma sighed. The sigh howled through Shakthi like a cold wind.



Shakthi dragged herself to her room. She changed her clothes. Her shoulders sagged. Her mouth felt dry.



Amma always complained about how Shakthi never won anything. Today, she'd won a prize. Just as Amma wanted. But Amma wasn't proud. She was disappointed. Again.

On her way home, Shakthi had felt bright with joy. Now, she felt lightless as a shadow.



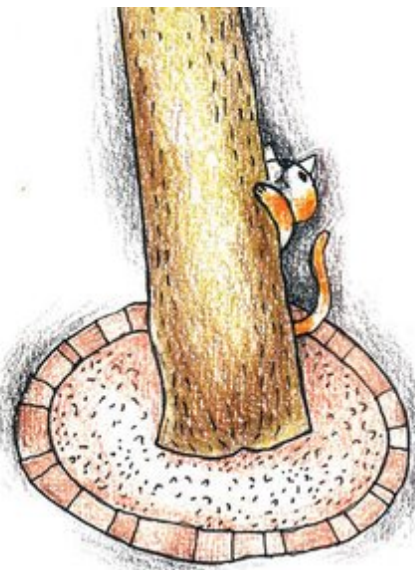
Outside, Shakthi's neighbour was making a kolam. Shakthi couldn't tell what it was.

If Shakthi made a kolam like that, Amma would tell her to stop making a mess. To stop wasting time. To stop being so careless and sloppy and useless.

A kolam like that would make Shakthi feel terrible. But this girl was humming to herself. She was smiling.

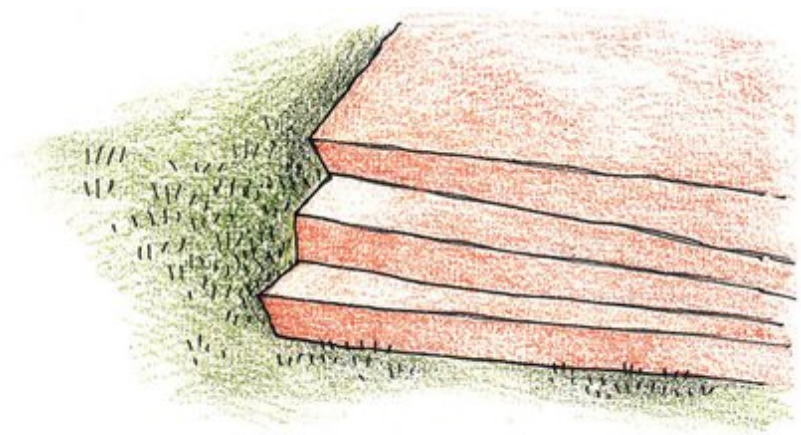
Doesn't she know she's not good enough? Shakthi thought. Darkness glided from Shakthi's chest to her throat, and onto her tongue.







"That kolam looks like bird poop,"
Shakthi said.

Surprised, the girl sat back on her
heels. And studied the design.
Then, she burst into laughter.



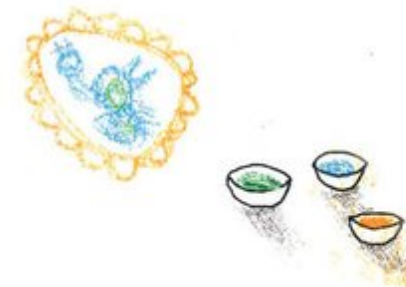


Shakthi was confused. Why was this girl laughing? She was a disappointment. She was supposed to be ashamed.



"It's a peacock!" The girl said between giggles. "But you're right. It looks like poop. Ocean-coloured poop. So, maybe from a mermaid?"

Shakthi snickered. Some of the darkness fell away.





"I'm Tejas," the girl said.
"Shakthi," Shakthi said. "Can I help?"
"Yes, please!" Tejas said.





Shakthi smoothed the kolam with sure, steady fingers until the mess became a peacock.

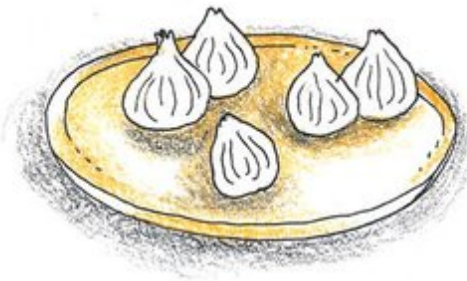


"Wow!" Tejas said. "Are you an artist?"
Shrugging, Shakthi said, "Well... I won an art contest in school."
"That's amazing!" Tejas squealed. "You're amazing!"

"You're amazing," Shakthi said. *"I was mean to you. But you're being nice to me. Why weren't you mean back?"*

"I have a trick," Tejas said. *"When people try to make me feel bad, I remind myself of all the reasons why I'm great."*



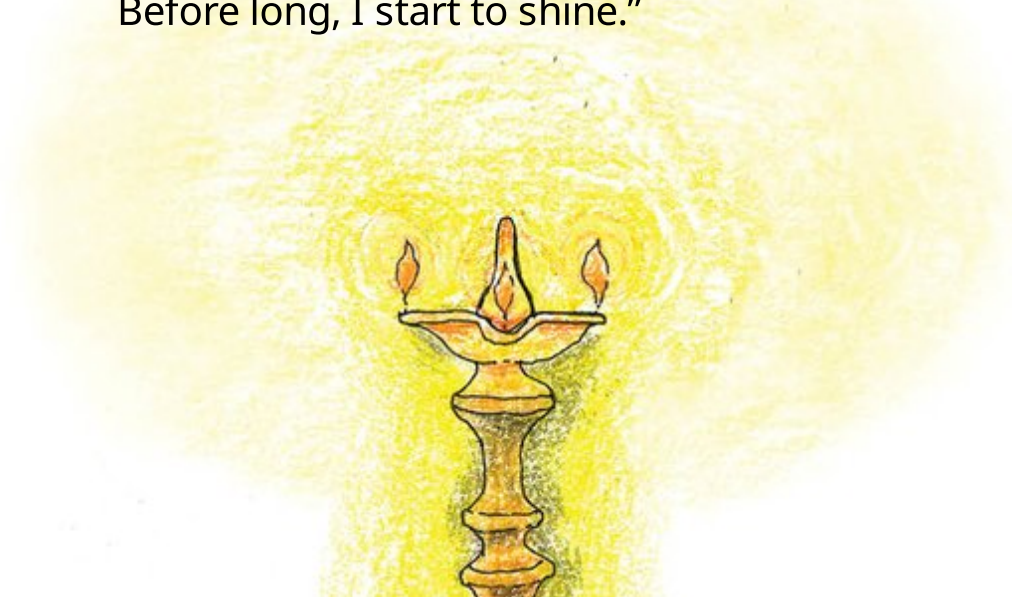


"Like, I'm the best kozhukatta folder in my family.
I have excellent handwriting.
I'm fantastic at standing on one leg!"

Tejas sprang up. She posed like a heron.

Shakthi clapped.

"It's like each of my good parts is a lamp inside
me," Tejas said, her body straight and steady.
"When I name them, they light up, one by one.
Before long, I start to shine."



Shakthi glanced at the house. Amma was lighting the lamp. Her perfectly pleated sari shimmered. She looked smart, graceful, beautiful—everything that Shakthi was not.

“What if I don’t have any good parts?” Shakthi asked. “Impossible!” Tejas said. “You’re an artist. You’re helpful. You’re a friend to animals.”

“I am?” Shakthi asked.

“You saved my peacock!” Tejas said.



Shakthi laughed louder than she had in days. No one had ever told her any of this before.



When Shakthi laughed, Amma's head whipped around like a cyclone. Storm clouds blackened her forehead. Lightning flashed through her eyes.

"Shakthi, is that you, bleating like a goat? And covered in kolam powder? Can't you stay clean for five minutes? Go change. Again."

"Yes, Amma," Shakthi said. To Tejas, she said, "I'd better go."

"Remember the trick," Tejas said. Then she waved goodbye.





Amma's words stormed through Shakthi.
They dragged the darkness closer and
closer—but not close enough.
This time, the darkness wouldn't get in.
Shakthi wouldn't let it.



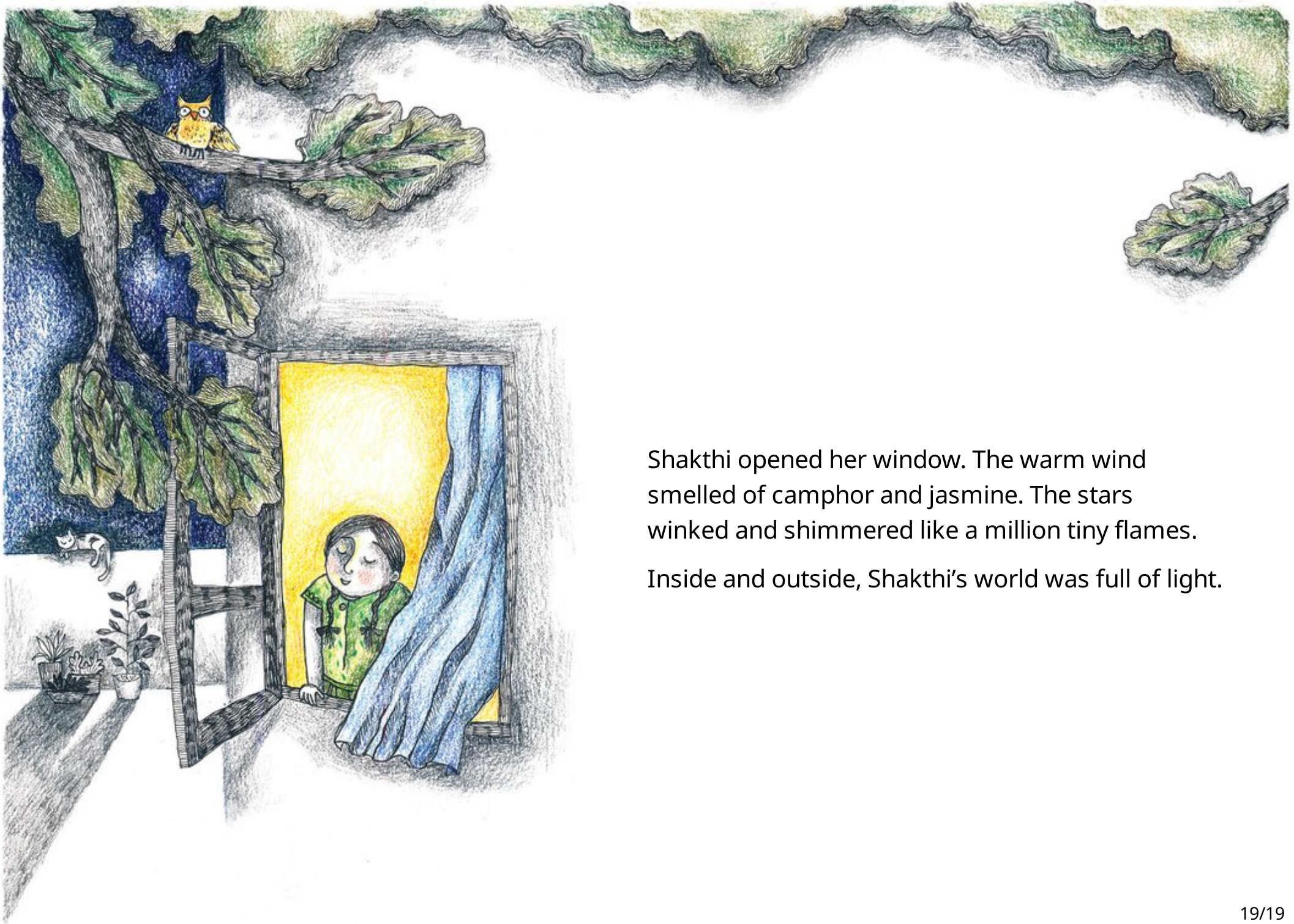
"I'm an award-winning artist," she said, pulling on clean clothes. "I am a champion at cutting straight lines."

"I'm helpful.
I'm creative.
I'm funny.
I'm kind."



Tejas was right! Inside Shakthi's chest, lamp after lamp caught and blazed. Before long, her whole body glowed, cosy and bright.





Shakthi opened her window. The warm wind smelled of camphor and jasmine. The stars winked and shimmered like a million tiny flames. Inside and outside, Shakthi's world was full of light.

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Full of Light

(English)

When it comes to her Amma, Shakthi can't seem to do anything right. She feels like a disappointment—until she meets a girl who reminds her that all of us have the ability to shine bright.

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



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