

A Journey of Peace

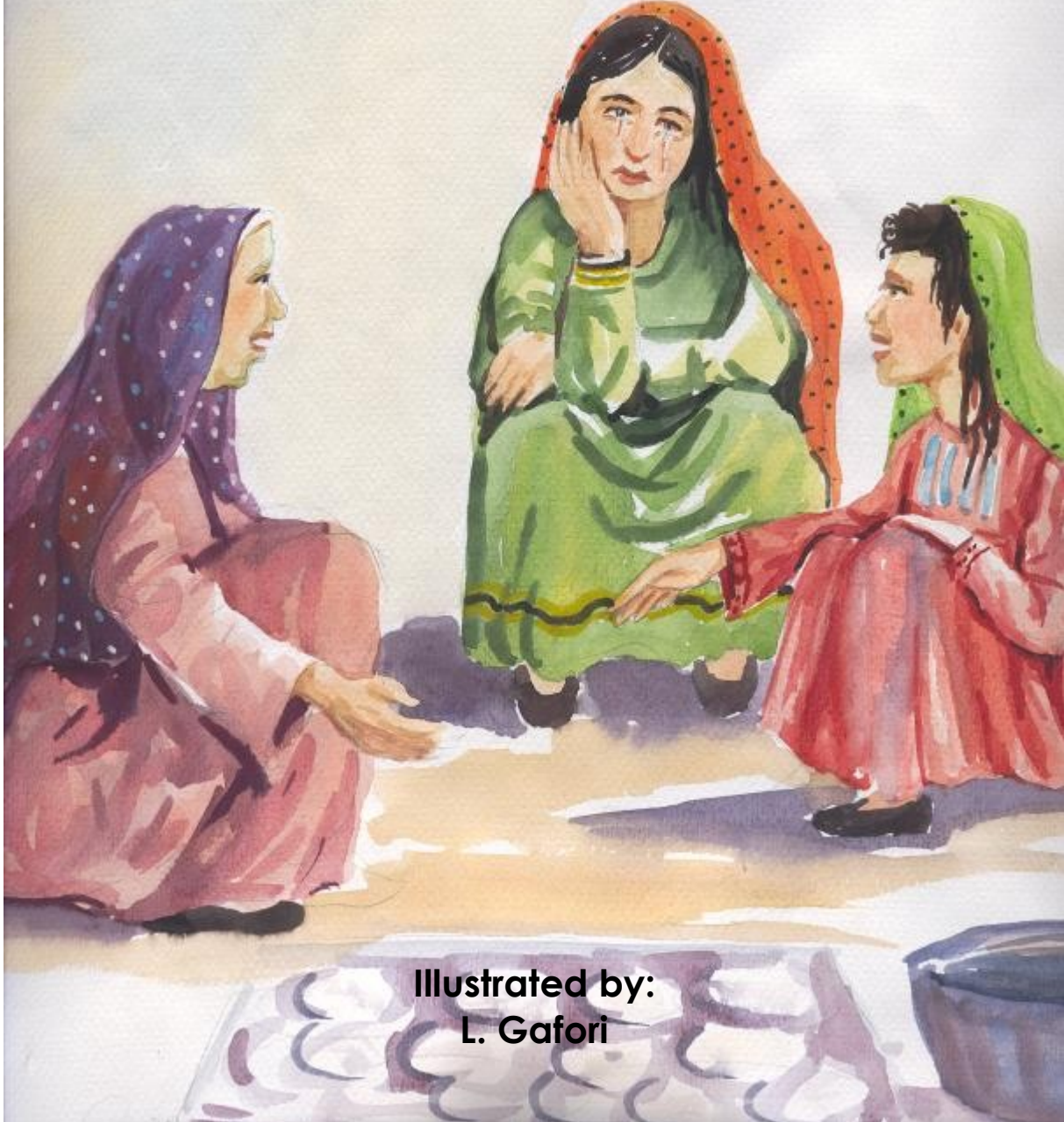
Story 3

Making Cookies

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Second Edition

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Story Characters:

Jameela: a ten-year-old girl who lives with her family in a rural area of Afghanistan.

Ahmed: Jameela's five-year-old brother.

Abdullah: Jameela's fifteen-year-old brother.

Haleema: The children's mother.

Merza: The children's father.

Bibi Jan: The paternal grandmother.

Kaka Ghulam: The paternal grandfather.

Yunus: The children's uncle who killed by a landmine at age 20, youngest son of Bibi Jan and Kaka Ghulam.

Fatima: The children's aunt, young widow of Uncle Yunus.

Aly: The children's uncle, who lives in the city.

Aisha: The children's aunt, Aly's wife, who lives in the city.

Story Synopsis:

Jameela lives with her family in a village in Afghanistan. They were already experiencing a great deal of difficulty during the domestic struggles of their homeland when tragedy struck. After coming in contact with a landmine while working in the field, Uncle Yunus was killed and her father Merza lost his leg.

In “**Jameela’s Garden**”, Jameela and her younger brother Ahmed try to understand the anger and estrangement demonstrated by their older brother Abdullah. With the guidance of their grandmother, Bibi Jan, they learn how they might help him get over the loss of his Uncle Yunus, with whom he was very close.

“**The Wisdom of Bibi Jan**” further demonstrates the grandmother’s role as comforter and adviser. Abdullah’s concern over the change in personality of a school friend due to the trauma of the war triggers Jameela’s revelation that she is having nightmares, and Bibi Jan provides her with a special cure for her fears.

Much more of what is troubling Jameela is presented in “**Making Cookies**”. Her fear of landmines is so strong that, much to Abdullah’s annoyance, she is frightened walking along a path that has already been cleared. Bibi Jan uses the opportunity of making cookies to help Jameela come to terms with her father’s injury, as well as finding for Fatima a positive means of expression of grief for Yunus.

Healing Elements:

Healing images and symbols: nurturing, staring down fears, courage, strength, self-nurturing, self-healing, happy memories, growth, singing, empowerment, laughter.

Modeling of peaceful and virtuous acts: service to others, cooperation, empathy, emotional support, helpfulness, reflective listening, recognition and praise of virtuous acts, affection, humour, physical comforting, religious devotion.

Problem Issues: Post Traumatic Stress Symptoms: anger, flashbacks, intrusive memories, avoidance, fear, nightmares, sleep disturbance, anxiety, hyper-vigilance, over-reactivity, “triggers” of memories.

Healing Strategies: spending time listening to the troubled child, hugging and comforting, “exposure “ to hurtful memories and realities, use of drawing, distraction from hurtful memories, supporting each other in difficulties.

Jameela and Abdullah were walking home from a neighbour's house. The path was narrow. Jameela kept to the very centre of it and placed her feet carefully one in front of the other in a straight line.

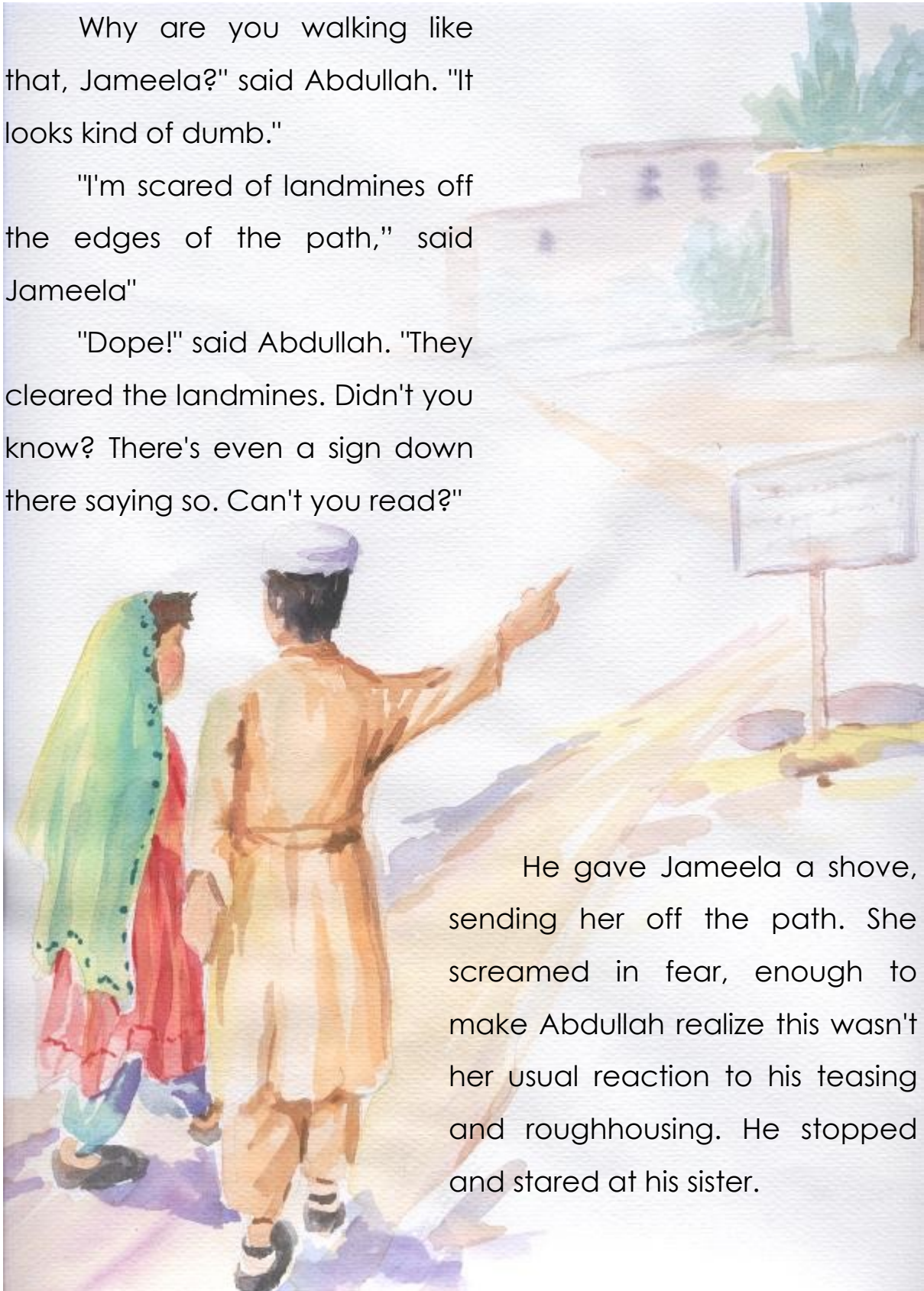


Why are you walking like that, Jameela?" said Abdullah. "It looks kind of dumb."

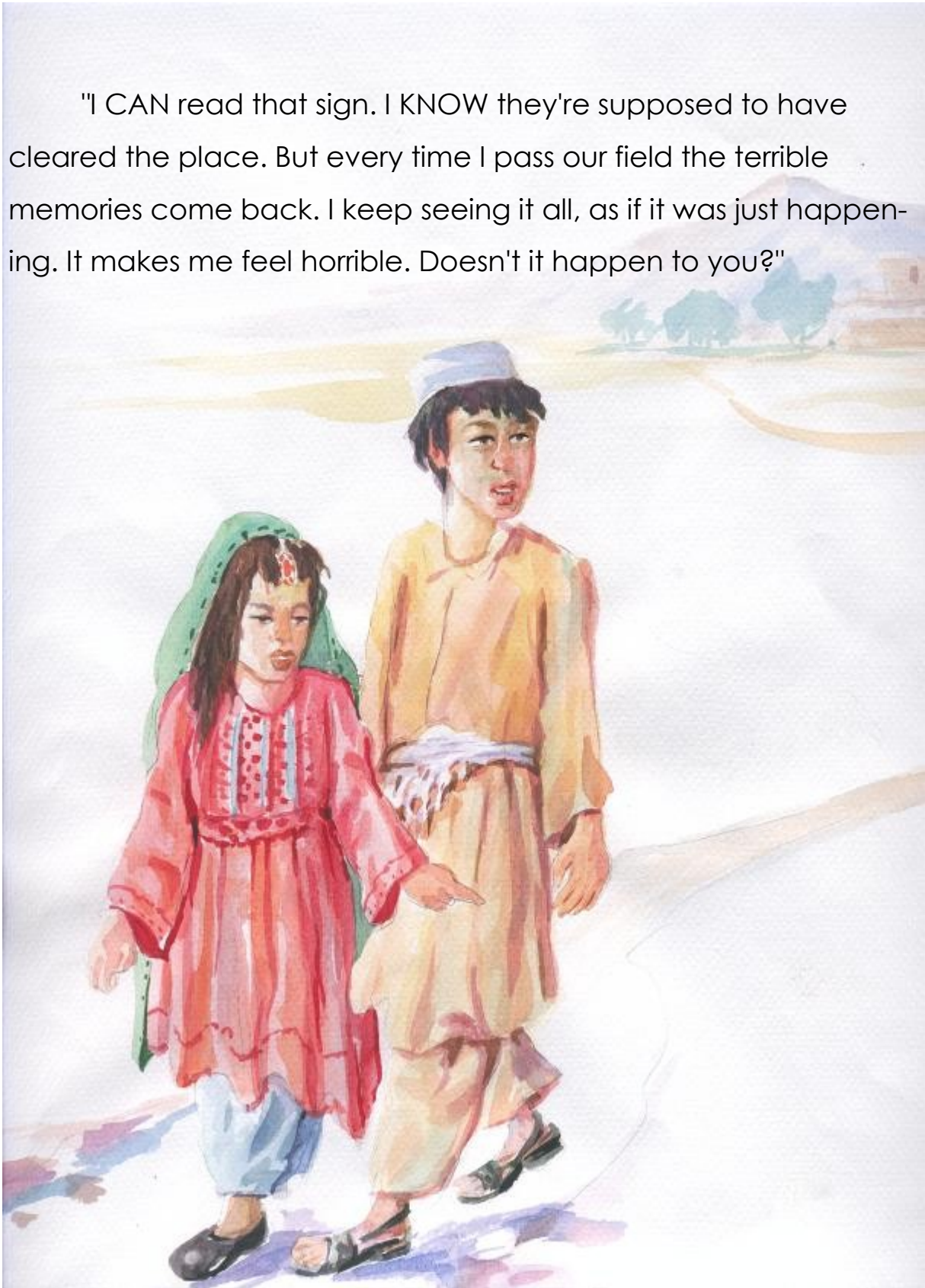
"I'm scared of landmines off the edges of the path," said Jameela"

"Dope!" said Abdullah. "They cleared the landmines. Didn't you know? There's even a sign down there saying so. Can't you read?"

He gave Jameela a shove, sending her off the path. She screamed in fear, enough to make Abdullah realize this wasn't her usual reaction to his teasing and roughhousing. He stopped and stared at his sister.

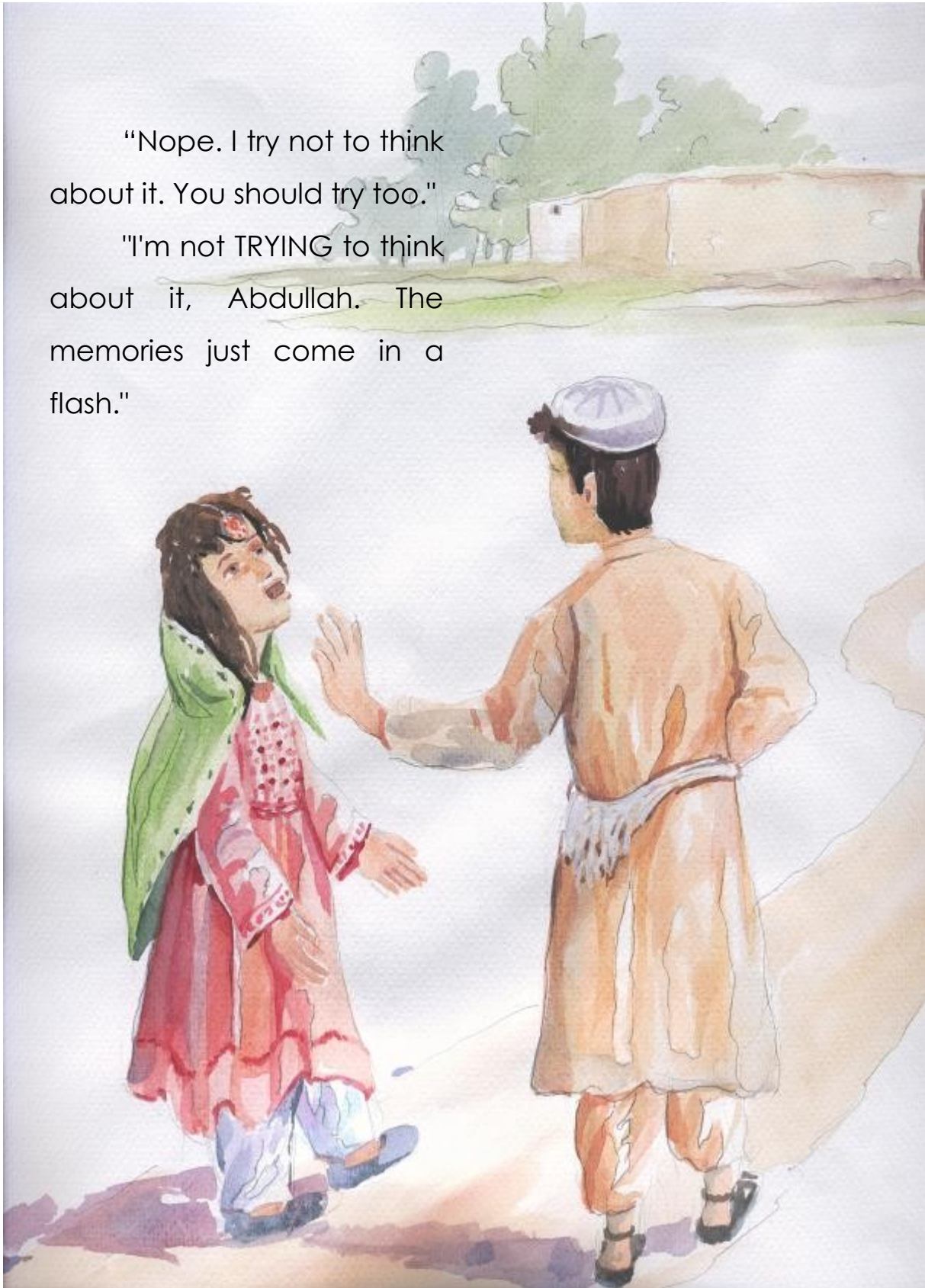


"I CAN read that sign. I KNOW they're supposed to have cleared the place. But every time I pass our field the terrible memories come back. I keep seeing it all, as if it was just happening. It makes me feel horrible. Doesn't it happen to you?"



"Nope. I try not to think about it. You should try too."

"I'm not TRYING to think about it, Abdullah. The memories just come in a flash."



"The children reached home and went into the house. Abdullah quickly found his school books and began his studies.



"Jameela," called her grandmother. "Could you take this cup of tea to your father, dear? He's sitting outside."

Jameela paused. "Bibi, could you get Ahmed to do it? I have to water my garden." This was most unlike Jameela, who was usually a willing little girl with tasks. But Bibi Jan noticed a pattern - every time a task involved her father, Jameela tried to get out of it. Bibi Jan took the tea out herself, thinking deeply.



Jameela saw her and ran up. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, Bibi Jan."



"Jameela, I think we'll make some cookies together. Let's get started." Bibi Jan headed toward the kitchen.



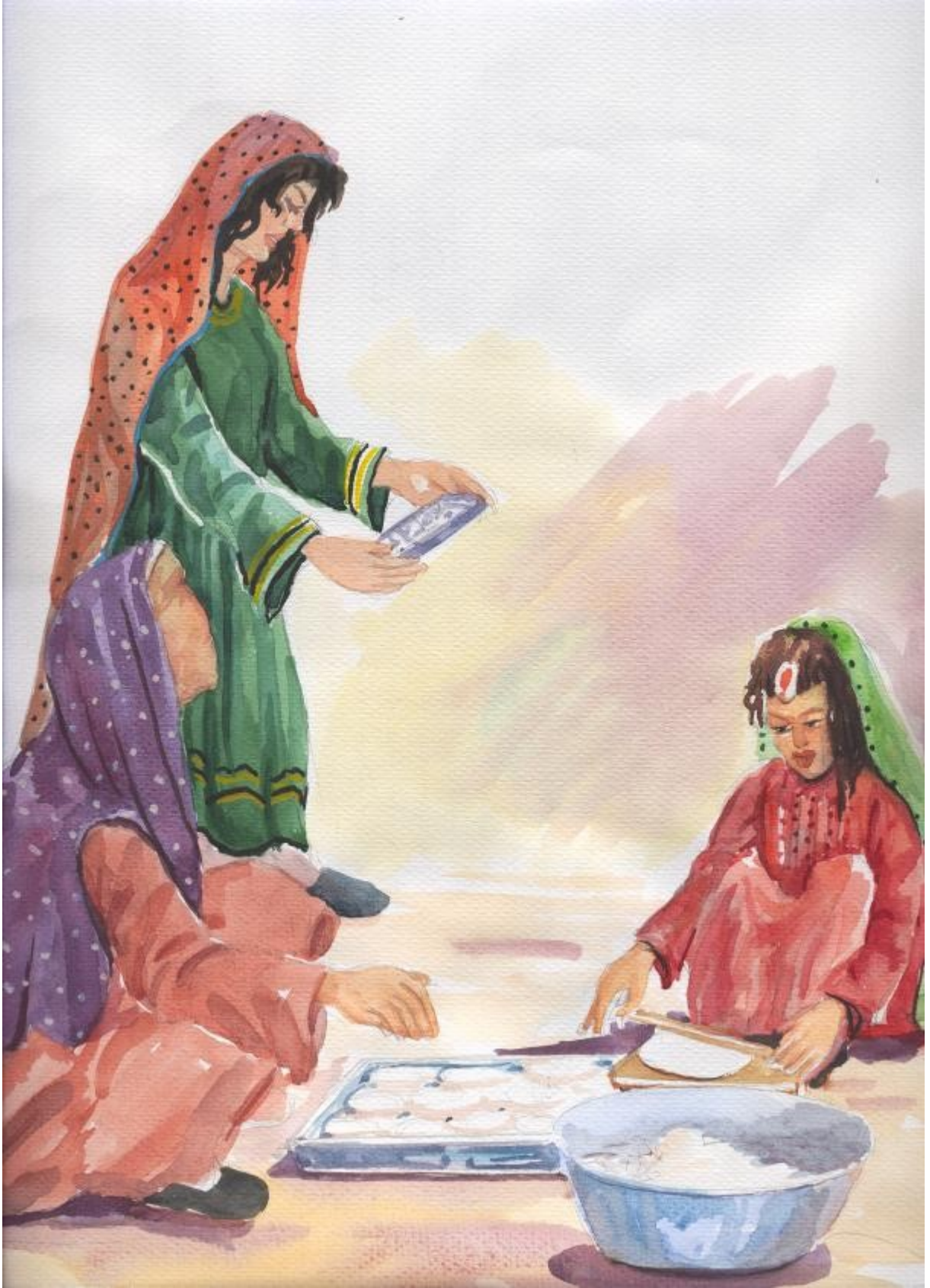
Jameela stood in amazement. Had she heard right? She was expecting a reprimand, even a punishment, and now her grandmother was saying they'd make cookies together. Making cookies was special enough, but she'd never before been allowed to help.



In the kitchen, Bibi Jan got the flour, the ghee and the sugar. She let Jameela beat the mixture together with the big wooden spoon.

"My word! You are a good cookie maker. I think you should taste it to see if it's right." She winked at Jameela. The mixture was so delicious! Jameela would have liked to eat it just like that, before it went into the oven. Fatima, Bibi Jan's young daughter-in-law, came in and saw what they were doing. She got out the pans for cookies and began preparing them. They began to shape the cookies into rounds.





"Jameela," said Bibi Jan, " You know when you were telling me a little while ago about your frightening nightmares of the landmine explosion?" Jameela nodded. "Sweetheart, I think there's something more bothering you."

Jameela wondered how her grandmother could know. "Bibi," she said. "Can you have day-mares?"

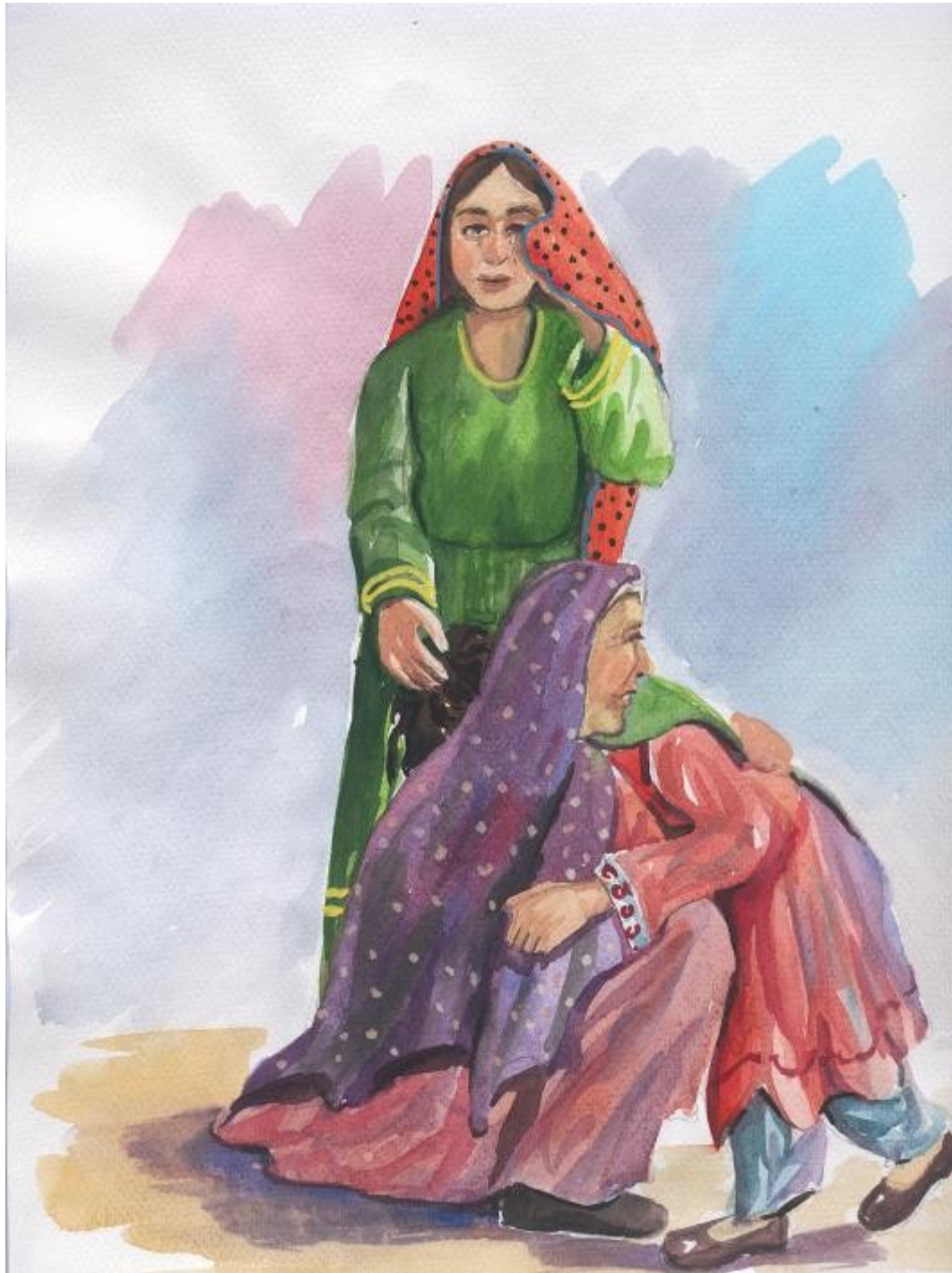
"Day-mares? Day-mares? What do you mean, darling?" asked Bibi Jan. Fatima looked attentively at Bibi Jan.

"Well, Bibi Jan, sometimes in the day-time, I get these sudden memories of what I saw on the landmine day. Something reminds me and then, all at once, it's as if I'm there all over again. It's horrible." Fatima stopped shaping the cookies and stood like a statue.

"Darling, I know exactly what you mean. I didn't know this was happening to you. I'm glad you told me. But one more thing: How does this connect with your father?"

Jameela wondered if her grandmother could see into her mind. "Bibi," -a little sob escaped- "I do love Daddy. But when I see his leg, what's left of it I mean, the memories come back and I hate that. So I try to stay away and not look at it. That's why I didn't want to take the tea to him." Now Jameela was really crying. Fatima had turned pale as images of her dying husband flashed in her mind.

"Oh dear," said Bibi Jan. "Our cookie recipe definitely doesn't include tears. Come and sit on my lap." Jameela snuggled into her grandmother's hug. Fatima knelt beside them, stroking Jameela's hair. Her hand was trembling.



"These are things I learned from someone who was very old when I was very young," began Bibi Jan. "It didn't mean so much when I was young, but as my life flowed along, there were some very bad things that happened, and then I remembered what I'd been taught. I followed the instructions and it helped. This strengthened me for the worst thing that happened, the day of the landmine. So now it's time for me to teach you two."

Fatima's hand became still as she listened intently. Jameela's crying stopped. "She told me that when bad memories spring into your mind, don't run away from them. They will only follow you. You try to hide from them and they leap out at you."

"But what can you do, Bibi Jan?" Fatima spoke for the first time. "The memories are so terrible. They're unbearable."

"You stare them down", said Bibi Jan.

"Stare them down?" said Fatima, amazed. "But how can you do that? "

"You breathe in all the courage you have, and all the strength you have, and ask for the help of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful, and then you breathe out and stare it down. At first, you can only do this for a short time, because it is so hard. Then you have to let yourself get away for a little time. You do something to remind yourself that you're not in the time of the memory, you're here, right now. Sometimes I make myself a cup of tea; sometimes I go and watch the children playing.

"Then something reminds you and the memory leaps back. You breathe in and out and stare it down again, this time for a bit longer. After a while, you feel as if you're getting stronger than the memory, and that slowly it is taking the proper place of all memories, at the back of your mind, to come out only when called."

Jameela had sat up and was staring at her grandmother. Fatima was open-mouthed. "Bibi, do you have this too?" she asked.

"Yes, darlings. I know exactly what you're talking about because it happens to me too. And Fatima, dear, you must be suffering too in the same way."

"Oh, I am, I am, Bibi Jan. It's terrible. Sometimes I don't know how I can get through a day. I seem to be living in a hell of terrible memories. So many things set off a memory, and then it's as if I'm there, on that terrible day. And the nights are worse."

"Fatima, Jameela, we can get through this. Do what I told you and I think you'll start to feel stronger than the memories. Sometimes it takes a short time, sometimes it takes a long time, but we can get through it. If you're having a bad time in the days ahead, come to me and we'll stare the memories down together. Then, when we've done enough staring down, we'll look at the picture of Yunus that we took last Eid, where he looks so handsome in his new clothes and turban."



"You are so brave, Bibi Jan. I'd like to be as brave as you," proclaimed Jameela.

"You will be, little one. You have a brave heart." Bibi Jan gave her an extra hug. "When you have been brave and stared down the memory a bit, you should go and do something nice, like playing in your garden or singing one of your favourite songs. Jameela," said Bibi Jan, suddenly, "go into the garden and bring back three small smooth stones."

On her return, Bibi Jan gave Jameela and Fatima each a stone and held one in her palm. "Now, when we need to remind ourselves that we are here, now, and not in that time of terrible memories, we can each feel our stone in our pocket, and think of each other."

"Bibi," said Jameela, "what if I don't feel brave enough to stare it down?"

"Then you can go and draw the memory. That takes courage too," offered Fatima. Her tear-stained cheeks were pink again. "When I visited my parents last month, my brother, the one who's a doctor, was there. He asked me about bad memories. He called them flashbacks. He said they are often brought on by a small thing that reminds you. That's exactly how it is with me. He told me also that people who suffer from these memories are more nervous and jumpy, as if they are worried about something bad happening again, any time."

Jameela remembered how anxious she felt on the path by the fields. "My brother said that lots of people who have had terrible experiences suffer from this problem and that it has a name - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. I asked him what the doctors did for it. He tried to explain, but I must say it sounded a good deal like what you've told us, Bibi Jan."

"Ah, well, darlings. There's nothing new under the sun. People have always had bad experiences, and they've had to deal with them. Sometimes they do it well and become stronger, and sometimes they do it badly and become weaker. It's nice to have a modern name, but it's the same old thing. You have to be brave and not run away, and you have to stare the memory down for as long as you can. Sometimes, you have to make yourself be with what reminds you of the bad memory and get used to it."

"How would you do that, Bibi Jan?" said Jameela.

"Well, you try not to look at your father's leg because it brings back memories, right? Now, you have to be brave and make yourself look at your father's leg for longer and longer periods of time."

Jameela found herself wanting to run away from this idea. Then she remembered that she wished to be a brave woman like her grandmother.

"Tonight, when I massage your father's leg, how about you stay with me and hold the ointment? You don't have to look all the time. Just as much as you can handle and you can try to think of it in a new way- as the sign of a father who loves his family and had the courage to till the fields despite the risk of mines."

"OK, Bibi Jan. I think I can do that."

"Fatima, you are suffering so much. You can come to me when it gets hard."

Fatima's tears glistened. "Thanks, Bibi Jan. I want to be a brave woman too."

"You know," said Bibi Jan, "sometimes it seems like having a big lump of something that tastes terrible in your mouth. You can't swallow it and you can't spit it out. No matter how much you don't want to, you have to chew it up until it goes down. Oh my goodness! We're making something that's going to taste very good. The fire is just right for the cookies. Let's quickly finish them and get them baking. "

The three of them shaped and decorated the cookies. Bibi Jan put the letter J on half of hers and the letter F on the other half. Fatima slipped them into just the right spot in the oven. They sat and waited, sipping tea. The smell of the cookies baking was wonderful.

When they were just golden, Fatima took them out. Together they lay them out to cool. Just then little Ahmed darted into the kitchen. He had smelled the cookies. He snatched one off the table and ran off laughing. Jameela grabbed the wooden spoon and chased him, laughing too.

Story 3 Making Cookies

Things to Talk About:

Have you ever suffered from bad memories or flashbacks? Sometimes it helps to tell others about our frightening experiences.

Things to Do:

If you suffer from bad memories, you could try Bibi Jan's advice of staring the memory down, then giving yourself some relief by doing something nice. Also you could carry a little pebble to remind yourself that you are right here, right now and that other people understand what you are going through.

Also, Bibi Jan's advice was that if there are things that trigger the bad memories, to make yourself experience those things to get used to them again. At first do it for just a few moments, and then a little more and a little more until you no longer avoid that experience.

If flashbacks cause you problems, make a list of the pleasant things you can do to give yourself relief after you have tried to stare down the memories.

Have you ever made cookies? If not, ask someone to teach you. If you do know how, perhaps you could teach someone who does not.

