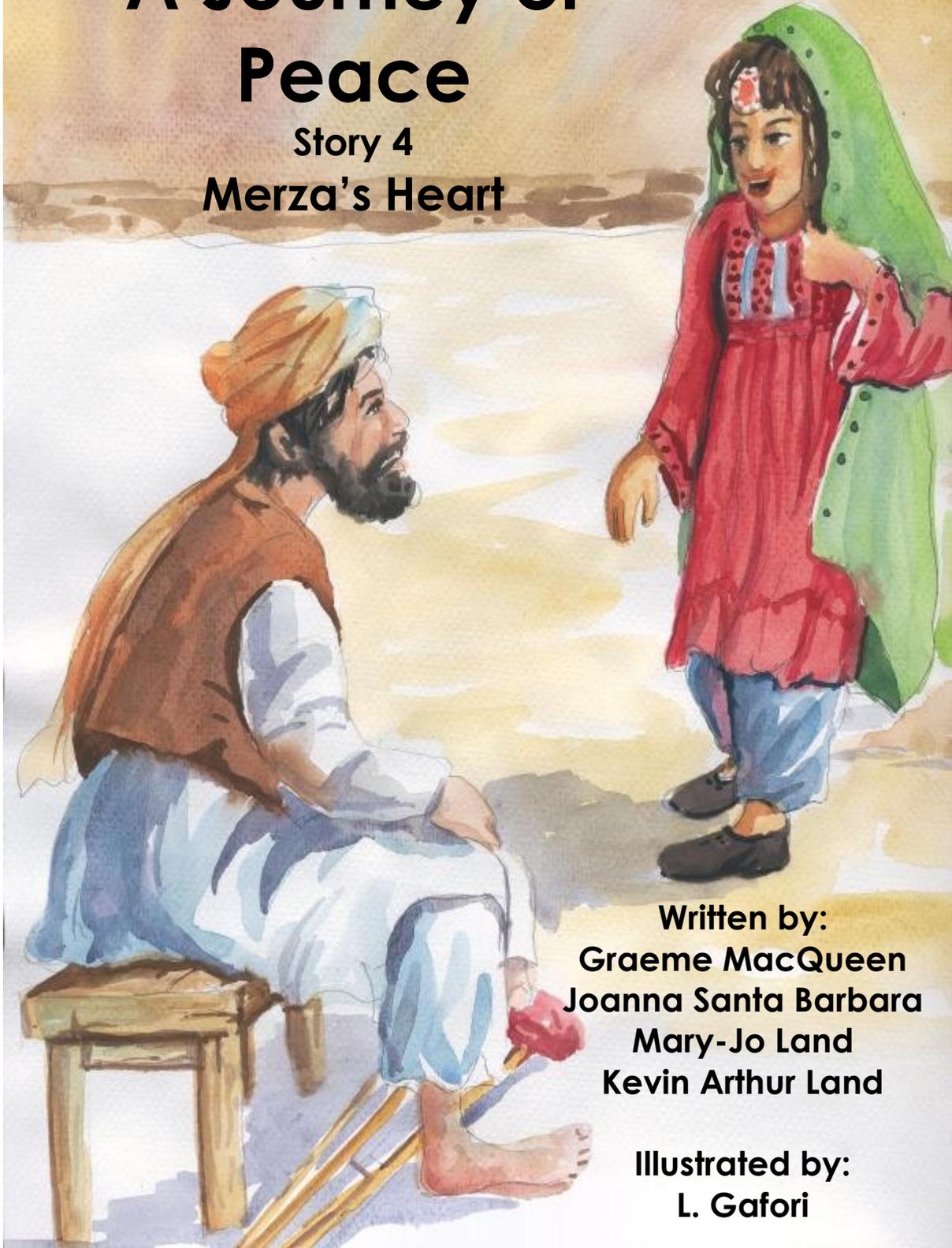


A Journey of Peace

Story 4
Merza's Heart



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Story 4

Merza's Heart

Second Edition

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2004, 2008

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, her 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.

Jameela is finding it very difficult to fathom the mysteries that are locked up inside **“Merza’s Heart”**. She mourns the loss of the cheerful father she knew before his injury, the one who was full of stories. Her innocent questions bring him to tears, but they also remind him of the man he used to be, and create the yearning in him to be that way again.

Healing Elements:

Healing images and symbols: laughter, giving, humour, dreams of happiness and peace.

Modeling of peaceful and virtuous interactions: compassion, patience, kindness, empathy, helpfulness, physical comfort, praise and recognition of virtuous acts.

Problem Issues: grief, depression, loss, isolation, remorse, sadness.

Healing Strategies: story telling, consulting, emotional support, empathy, emotional release, physical comfort.

It was the middle of the morning. Jameela watched her father Merza come out of the house. She was happy because she was no longer afraid to look at the stump of his leg. Merza was leaning on his crutch and moving very slowly.





He sat down on the old wooden bench in the yard and put his crutch on the ground. His shoulders were slumped and he was quiet, just looking at the ground.

Merza had been a happy man before the accident. Before the landmine killed Yunus and took off Merza's leg, Merza used to laugh and bring little presents to Jameela. Sometimes he would tell stories like Bibi Jan. Jameela would run up to him and say, "Tell me a story, Daddy!"

Merza would pretend that he couldn't remember any more stories. "Stories?" he would say. "Oh, I think I've used them all up! There aren't any left!"

But then he would smile and say, "Well, I do remember one little story about something that happened a long time ago," and off he would go. Sometimes they were sad stories, but usually they were happy and funny.

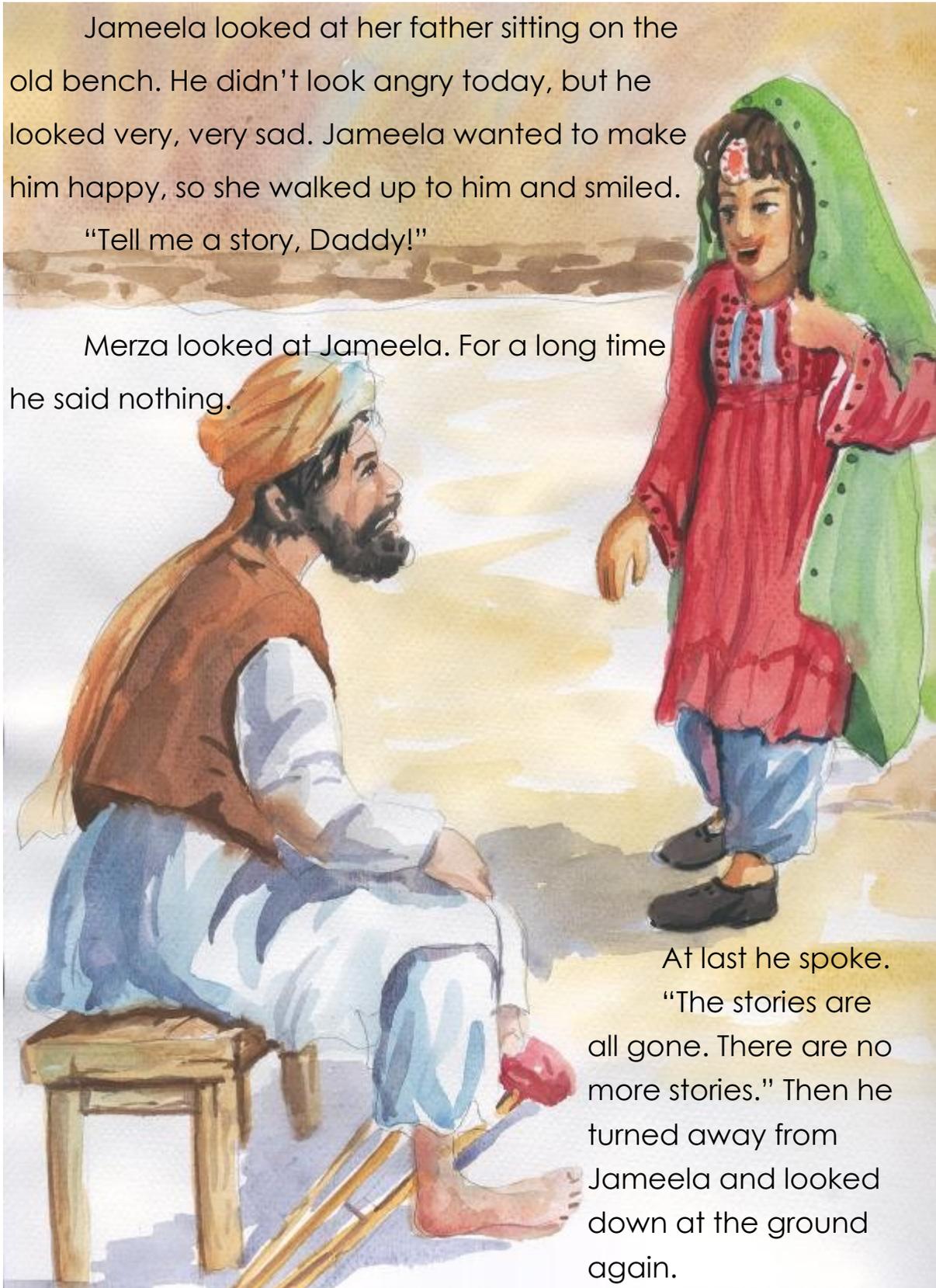
Ever since the landmine, Merza was an unhappy man, and sometimes he got angry for no reason. He hadn't told Jameela and Ahmed any stories for a long time.



Jameela looked at her father sitting on the old bench. He didn't look angry today, but he looked very, very sad. Jameela wanted to make him happy, so she walked up to him and smiled.

"Tell me a story, Daddy!"

Merza looked at Jameela. For a long time he said nothing.



At last he spoke.

"The stories are all gone. There are no more stories." Then he turned away from Jameela and looked down at the ground again.

Jameela frowned. She didn't understand. This time her father didn't seem to be joking. He looked very serious. But how could his stories be all gone? Jameela went to Bibi Jan.

"Bibi?"

"Yes, dear," her grandmother answered.

"Daddy says his stories are all gone." Bibi Jan listened while Jameela told her what Merza had said. Bibi Jan was quiet for a few moments. She was trying to figure out how to explain Merza's sadness.



“Jameela,” Bibi Jan said at last, “a heart holds a story the way a nest holds a beautiful bird. That bird is happy to be in the nest. It rests, it sings, it has babies. But what if there is a terrible storm and the wind blows so hard that the nest gets torn apart? Now there are holes in the nest! Little pieces of nest fluttering in the wind! That bird is not able to stay there. Maybe it has to fly away. Now, your father’s heart is like that nest. It has many holes in it. The stories have flown away. Who knows where they are now? Perhaps they have flown to the mountains.”

“Why did his heart get holes in it?” Jameela asked, puzzled.

“Oh, Jameela! When Yunus stepped on the landmine, that was a bad day! Your father lost his brother! And he lost his own leg! Jameela, that landmine blew many holes in your father’s heart!”

“Will his heart ever get better?” the saddened child asked.

Bibi Jan put her arms around Jameela. “You must be patient. Hearts take a long time to heal. You must be kind to your father, and you must let him talk about the things that make him sad.”

“But will the holes get fixed? Will the stories come back?”

Bibi Jan thought for a moment. “Remember when I said a story is like a bird? Well, that bird might be happy in the mountains for a while, but then it would get lonely for its old nest. I’m sure there is a story right now that is lonely for its old nest in Merza’s heart. Now, off you go to help your mother. And remember to be patient with your father.”





All the rest of the day, as Jameela helped her mother Haleema, she thought about her father's heart. She kept thinking of his heart as a little nest, hanging down from the tree with bits of grass and twigs falling out.

"How does a nest get mended?" she wondered to herself.

In the afternoon, Jameela went outside the house, and there was Merza, still sitting on the old wooden bench, still looking down at the ground. Jameela went to him.

"Daddy?"



Merza looked at his daughter.

“Daddy, can I tell you a story?”

“A story?” her father responded. “What...what do you mean?”

“Bibi says a story is like a bird and a heart is like a nest. She says when the bird's nest gets holes the bird flies away to the mountains. She says your heart is like a little bird's nest with holes.”

Merza was looking at his daughter now, listening.

“But I think a bird is the only thing that can fix a bird's nest,” Jameela continued. “So maybe a story is the only thing that can fix a heart. I could tell you a story.”

And then something very shocking happened. Merza began to cry! He put his head on his knees and cried and cried. Jameela didn't know what to do! She had never seen her father cry!





She ran into the house to get her mother, Haleema.

Haleema saw Jameela coming at the very same moment that she heard her husband crying. She ran outside to comfort Merza.

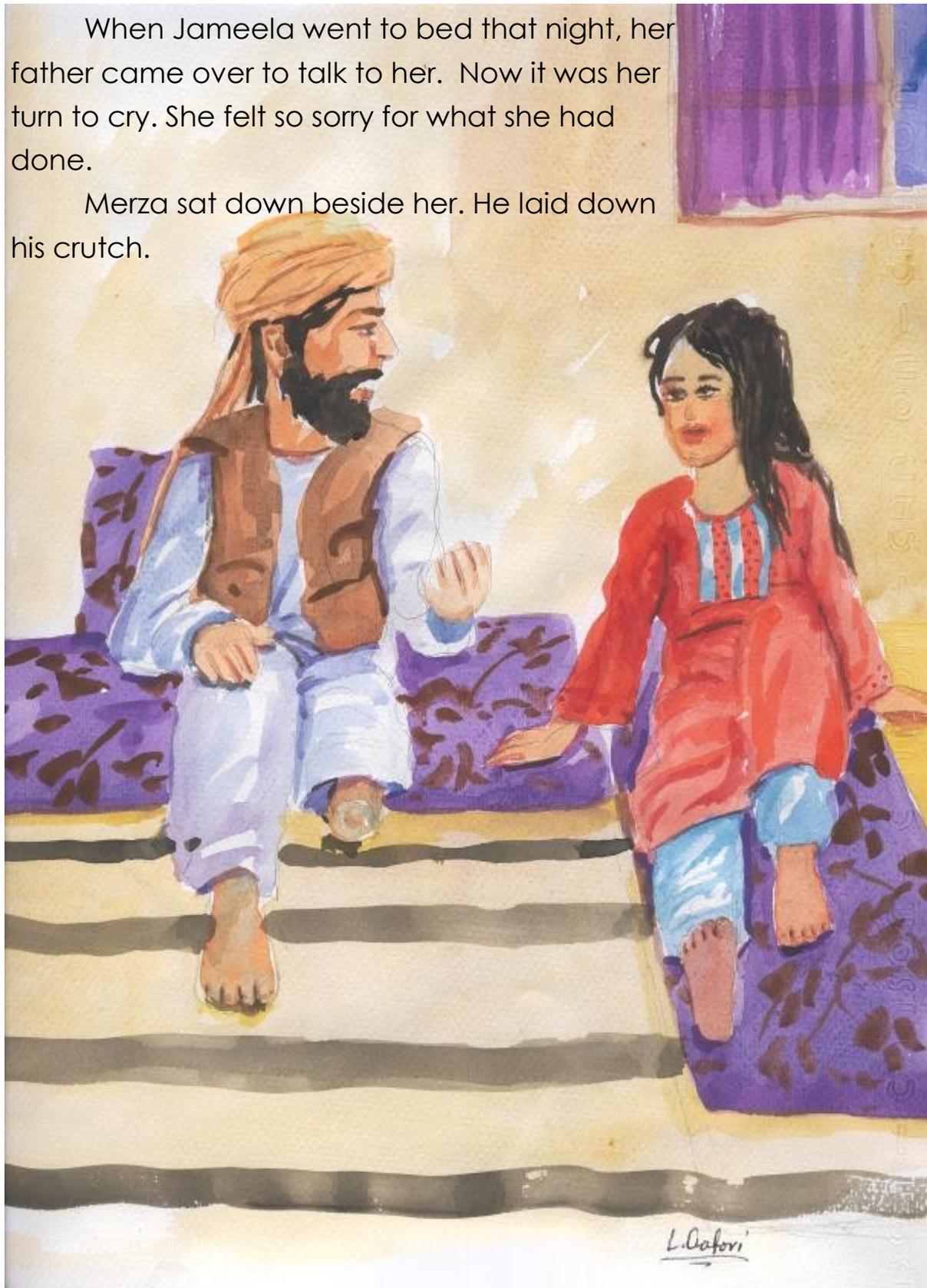
Jameela thought: "What have I done? I wanted to help my father and now look!"

Jameela sat in the house by herself and said nothing. She tried to sit so quietly that no one would notice her. Her stomach began to hurt and she felt very sad.



When Jameela went to bed that night, her father came over to talk to her. Now it was her turn to cry. She felt so sorry for what she had done.

Merza sat down beside her. He laid down his crutch.



“Don't cry, Jameela,” he said. “Bibi Jan's right. My heart is like a nest torn by a terrible wind. Sometimes I hear the wind moaning in the tree and I think my heart will blow away and be lost forever. When a man's heart is like this he has no stories. He has no joy. He feels as if he can't speak or eat or sleep or laugh. Sometimes he can't even cry. Today I was able to cry. Maybe that's a good thing.”

Jameela sat up. “Do you want me to tell you a story?” she asked.

Merza answered, “Yes. I think that would be very nice.”

So Jameela told Merza one of her father's old stories about the bad boy in the palace. Merza listened carefully. Once he had to wipe a tear from his eye. Once he smiled.

“You did a good job with that story,” he said, once she had finished. “Maybe you will become a great storyteller and you will help our people to feel better.”

“Does your heart feel better?” she asked.

“Well, Jameela, this heart is still not in good shape. It will take a long time to heal. But I believe your story has made it a bit stronger. Yes, I believe so. Maybe soon it will be strong enough to hold one of those tiny stories that fly in from the mountains early in the morning.”

And Merza patted Jameela’s head and tucked her into bed.

That night Jameela had a very good dream. All of Afghanistan was covered with grass and flowers and trees. People were walking in the tall grass, talking to each other and laughing. As they walked, strange, beautiful birds flew toward them. “Oh!” said Jameela. “Birds of so many colours! Little ones and big ones! These must be the stories of the people of Afghanistan. They are flying back to us from the mountains!”

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Things to Talk About:

1. Are there funny stories that you know? Can you tell one?
2. Do you know someone that has been hurt by a landmine? If so, how have they learned to help themselves? How could you help? How could the community help?
3. When someone you love is sad, it helps to talk and to listen. What could you say to someone who is sad to help him or her talk about his or her feelings?

Things to Do:

1. Write down or tell some of the funny stories that are told in your family and create a book or a recording with your friends.
2. If you know someone who has been hurt or who is sad, ask him or her if they would like to hear a story.

