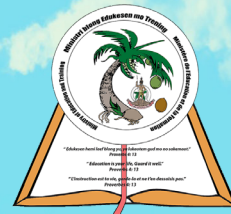


Level 6



Village Girl

By Virginia Taravaki
Illustrated by Margarita Yeromina

Village Girl



By Virginia Taravaki
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“No! I don’t want to go.
I don’t want to go!”







“Hey, it’s ok,” Sautonga soothed his daughter, gently wrapping her in his arms.





Tears running down her beautiful Melanesian face, Leiniaru could not look at her father. How could she? It was all too real. Too soon. Too sad.





“Dad, I don’t want to leave home.”

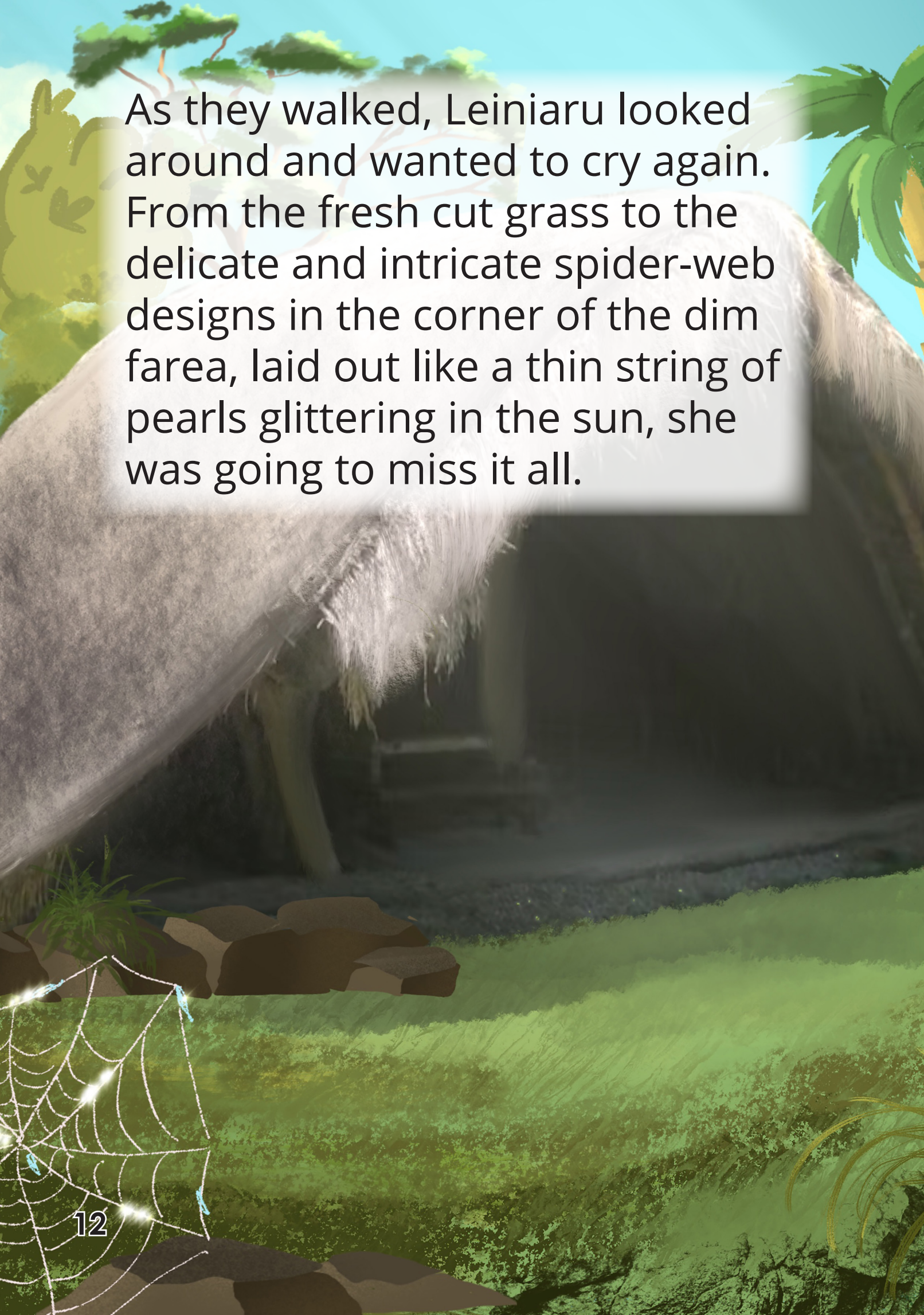
The words pierced Sautonga’s heart. A chief before his people in the village of Tewele and a father in the home, Sautonga gathered all his courage to let his daughter go.

"Follow me."

With a weary smile on his face,
Sautonga lead Leiniaru quietly
across the road to the truck.





The background of the page is a vibrant, painterly illustration of a tropical environment. In the upper left, there are green trees and foliage. On the right, a palm tree is partially visible. The central focus is a large, light-colored thatched roof of a hut, which slopes downwards from left to right. Below the roof, the interior of the hut is dark and shadowed. In the foreground, there is a lush green field with some rocks. In the bottom left corner, a white spider web is depicted, with several small blue insects or droplets on it. The overall lighting is bright and sunny, with a clear blue sky at the top.

As they walked, Leiniaru looked around and wanted to cry again. From the fresh cut grass to the delicate and intricate spider-web designs in the corner of the dim farea, laid out like a thin string of pearls glittering in the sun, she was going to miss it all.





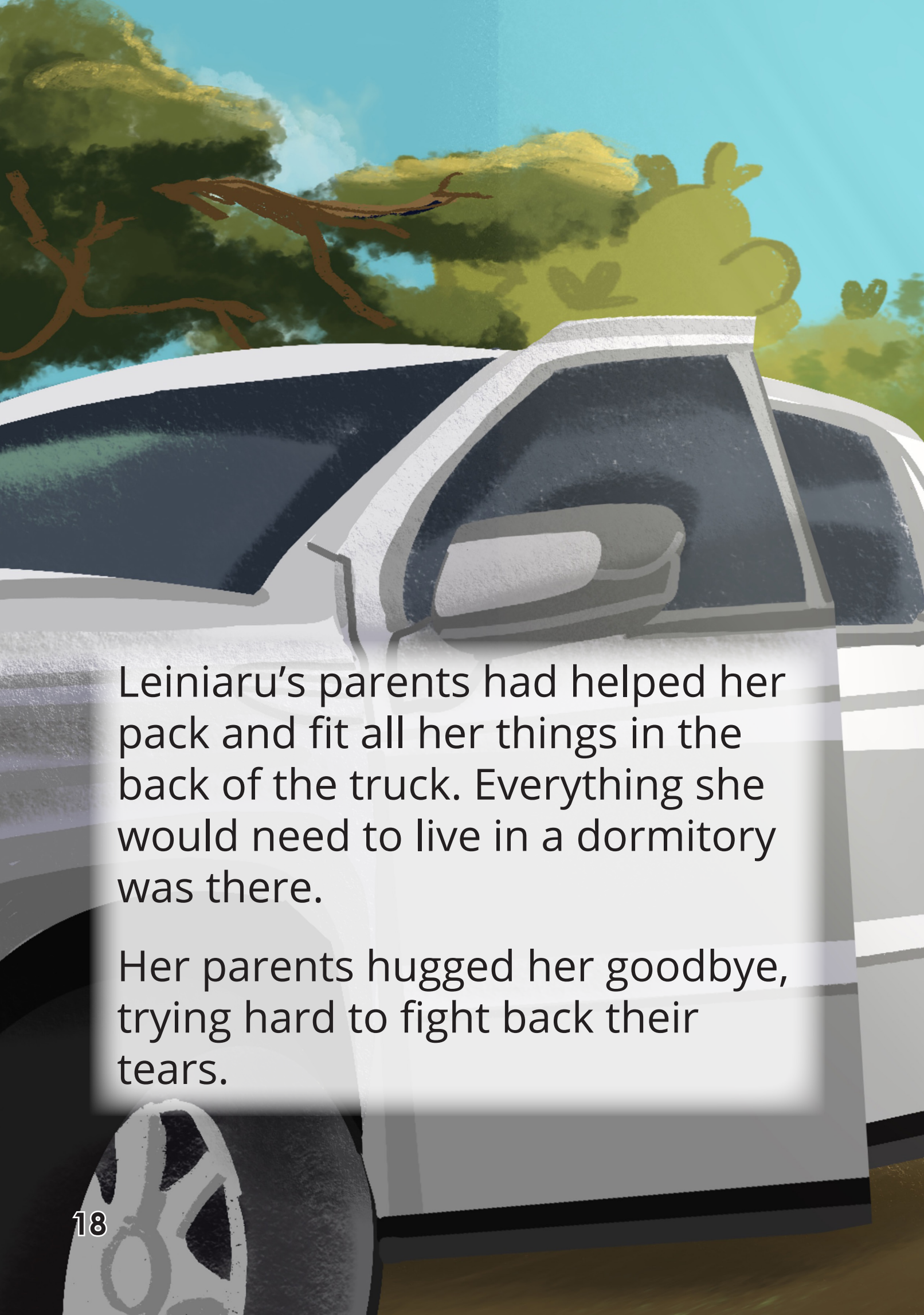
"My flower," Sautonga smiled.
"Everything will be ok. This is
for your future. Mum and I will
always be here, waiting for you.
You are always welcome home."



Leiniaru had been awarded a scholarship to study in the big city, six hours from her village. She wanted to study and learn, but if she went then she'd have to leave behind her parents and her people.







Leiniaru's parents had helped her pack and fit all her things in the back of the truck. Everything she would need to live in a dormitory was there.

Her parents hugged her goodbye, trying hard to fight back their tears.





The dirt paths mixed with mud and lava stones gradually transitioned to coal tar sealed roads. The tiny thatch homes turned into tall and modern steel buildings. Familiar faces disappeared to become new and strange people wearing new kinds of clothing and accessories.





The city was big! Bigger than the backyard garden in the village. The smell was different, too. The people looked different. Nobody said hello. Nobody smiled at Leiniaru — they were instead smiling at strange glowing objects in their hands.



The background of the page is a stylized illustration. At the top, there's a light blue sky with soft white clouds. On the right side, a portion of a purple building with yellow window frames is visible. In the middle ground, a white car is shown from the side, featuring a prominent red light bar on its roof. Behind the car, a house with a brown, diagonally striped roof is partially visible. The overall style is simple and colorful.

Leiniaru was scared. Nothing was familiar and there was no one around to help her.

"I don't like it here," said Leiniaru.
"I miss my mum and dad. I need to go back; this was a mistake."

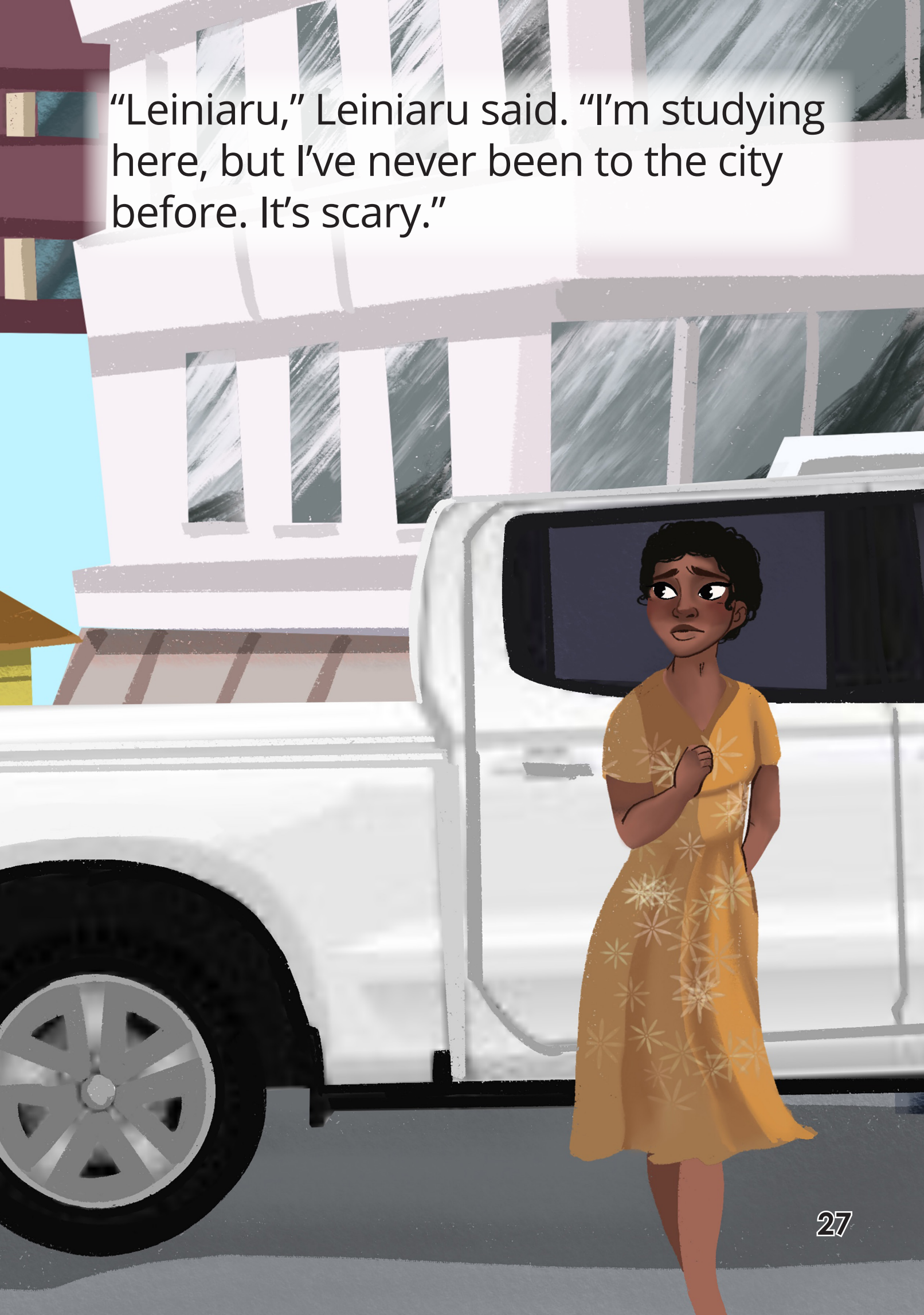
Tears started rolling down her face.

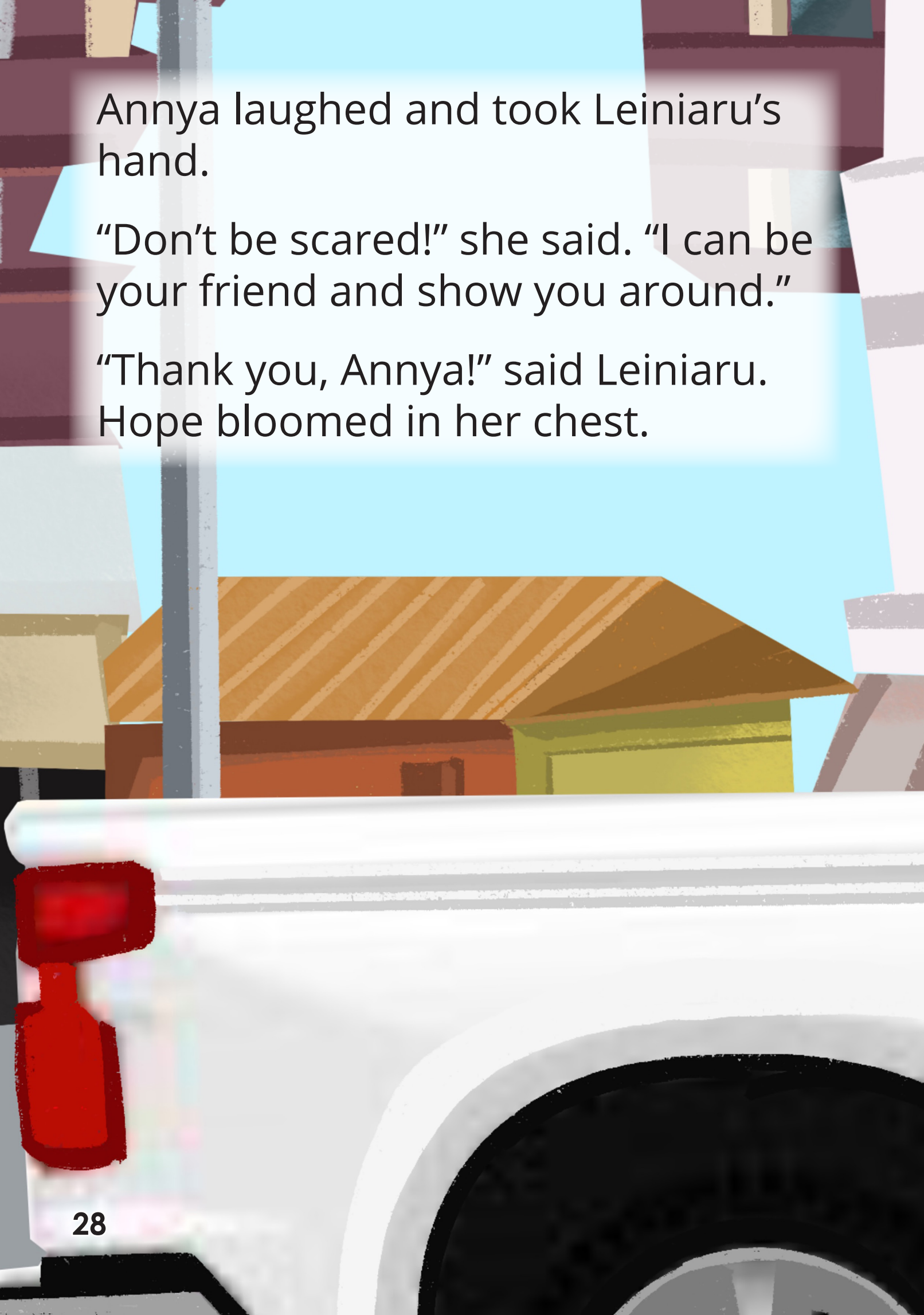


“Hello,” said a gentle voice. Leiniaru looked up and before her was a young girl. She looked around the same age as Leiniaru. “Are you new to the city? My name is Annya. What is your name?” She had a bright smile on her face.



“Leiniaru,” Leiniaru said. “I’m studying here, but I’ve never been to the city before. It’s scary.”



The background is a stylized, abstract illustration. It features a white car in the foreground, with a red taillight and a black wheel visible. Behind the car, there are various geometric shapes representing buildings and a sky. The sky is a mix of light blue and white. The buildings are in shades of brown, orange, and yellow. The overall style is modern and graphic.

Annya laughed and took Leiniaru's hand.

"Don't be scared!" she said. "I can be your friend and show you around."

"Thank you, Annya!" said Leiniaru. Hope bloomed in her chest.



Two girls, one from the village and the other from the big city, became friends that afternoon. They shared stories from their different worlds, but realised they weren't all that different. Leiniaru and Annya grinned at each other.



Maybe it wouldn't be so hard for a village girl to live in the big city.



**You can use these questions
to talk about this book with
your family, friends and
teachers.**



What kind of tree is in the yard?



Why is Leiniaru so sad?

**How would you feel if you had
to leave home?**



**Do you think it was a good decision for
the family to send her to university?**



**Imagine you are living away. Write a
pretend letter to your father.**

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About the author

Virginia Taravaki was born in Port Vila but has lived in Mele Village since 2014. She loves making laplap with her friends and family, and her favourite stories as a child were non-fiction novels and the Bible.



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Village Girl

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Save the Children



Original illustrations by Margarita Yeromina

Village Girl

Taravaki, Virginia

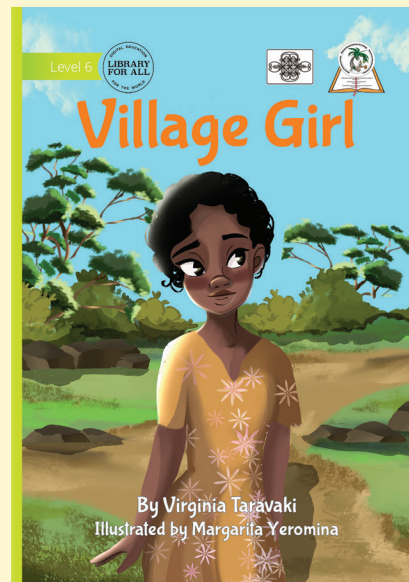
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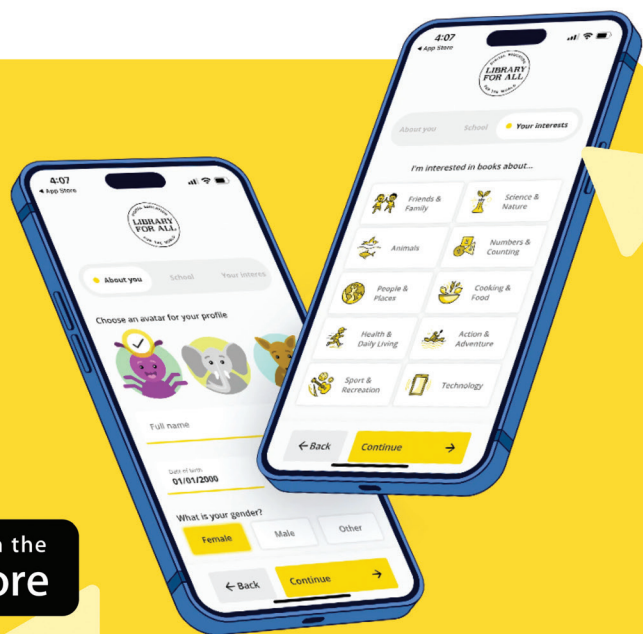


Village Girl

Leiniaru has the opportunity to go to school, but she has to leave home for it. Her family reassures her that she'll always be welcome back. Then she finds that school isn't as lonely as she thought.



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