

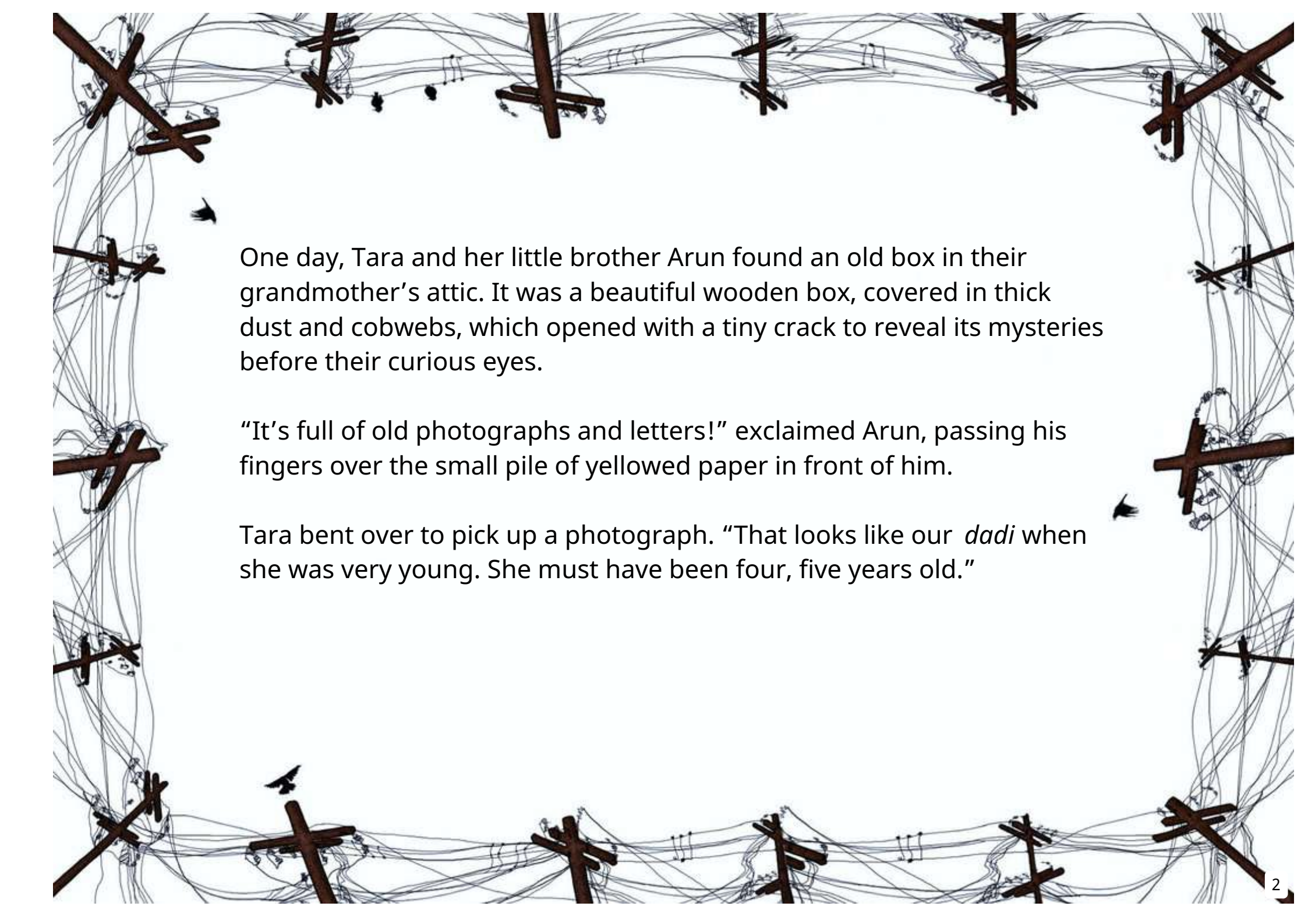


The Magic Mango

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Illustrator: Ioan Balcosi

Level 4



One day, Tara and her little brother Arun found an old box in their grandmother's attic. It was a beautiful wooden box, covered in thick dust and cobwebs, which opened with a tiny crack to reveal its mysteries before their curious eyes.

"It's full of old photographs and letters!" exclaimed Arun, passing his fingers over the small pile of yellowed paper in front of him.

Tara bent over to pick up a photograph. "That looks like our *dadi* when she was very young. She must have been four, five years old."





"Look, there's an old newspaper!" Arun read out the date on the page, a little unsure of himself. "26 September 1890?!" That seems like a very long time ago."

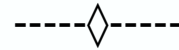
"It is," Tara chipped in, "it is a very long time ago! Even our *dadi's dadi* was not born then!"

She opened the newspaper carefully and spotted a red circle on one of the pages: "Whoever read this newspaper before must have found this interesting! I wonder why."

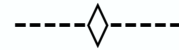
"What does it say?" Arun asked.



LATEST TELEGRAMS.



[REUTER'S TELEGRAMS.]



THE CASE OF THE MAGIC MANGO.

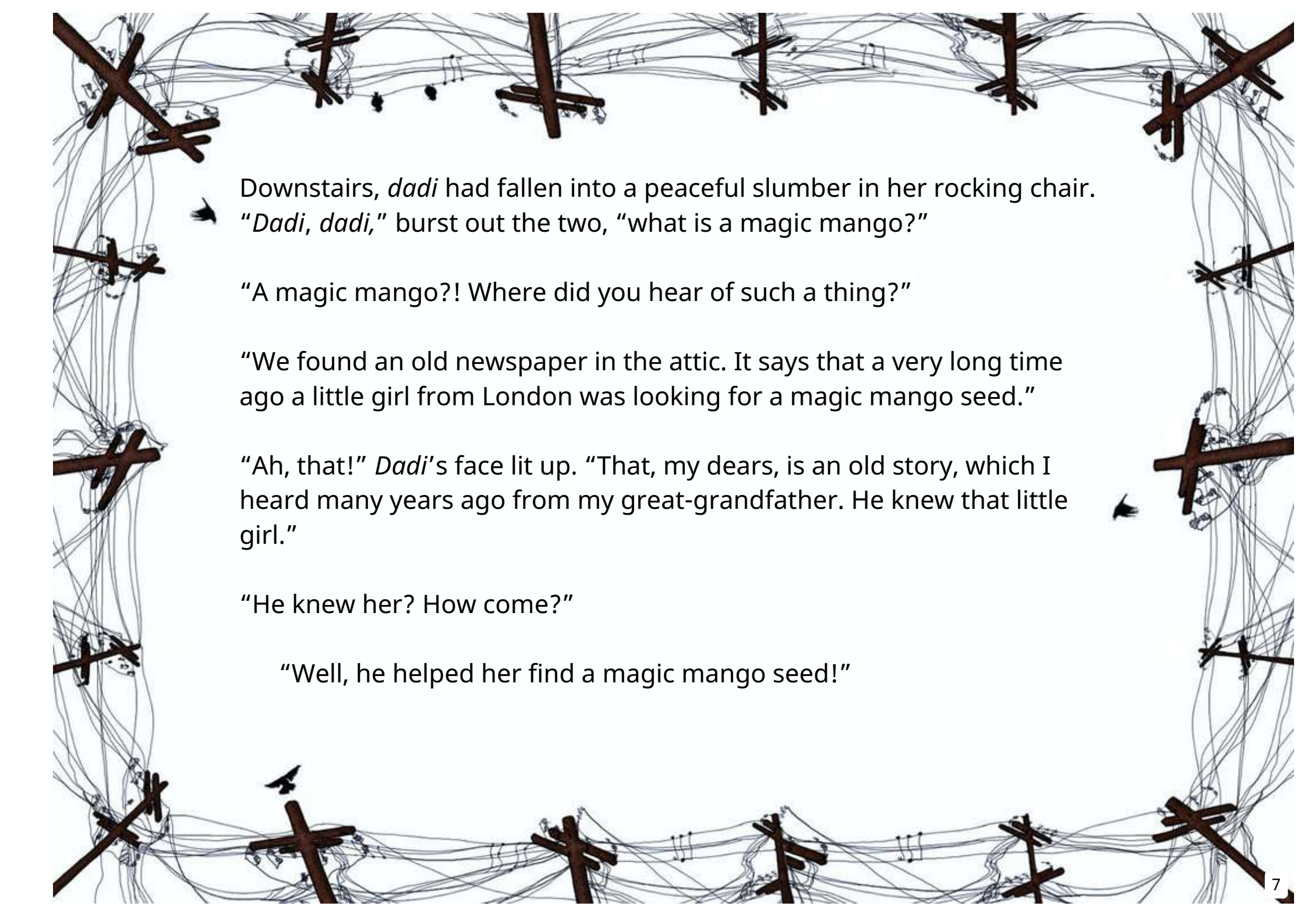
LONDON, September 25.

The Times publishes a paragraph stating that a little girl from London is searching for a magic mango seed. Offers of help may be communicated by telegraph to the following address...

"A magic mango seed? I wonder what that means," said Arun. He had seen and eaten lots of mangoes in his lifetime, but never a magic one. Not until now, at least.

"I don't know," replied Tara. "I guess we'd better ask *dadi*."





Downstairs, *dadi* had fallen into a peaceful slumber in her rocking chair.
“*Dadi, dadi,*” burst out the two, “what is a magic mango?”

“A magic mango?! Where did you hear of such a thing?”

“We found an old newspaper in the attic. It says that a very long time ago a little girl from London was looking for a magic mango seed.”

“Ah, that!” *Dadi*’s face lit up. “That, my dears, is an old story, which I heard many years ago from my great-grandfather. He knew that little girl.”

“He knew her? How come?”

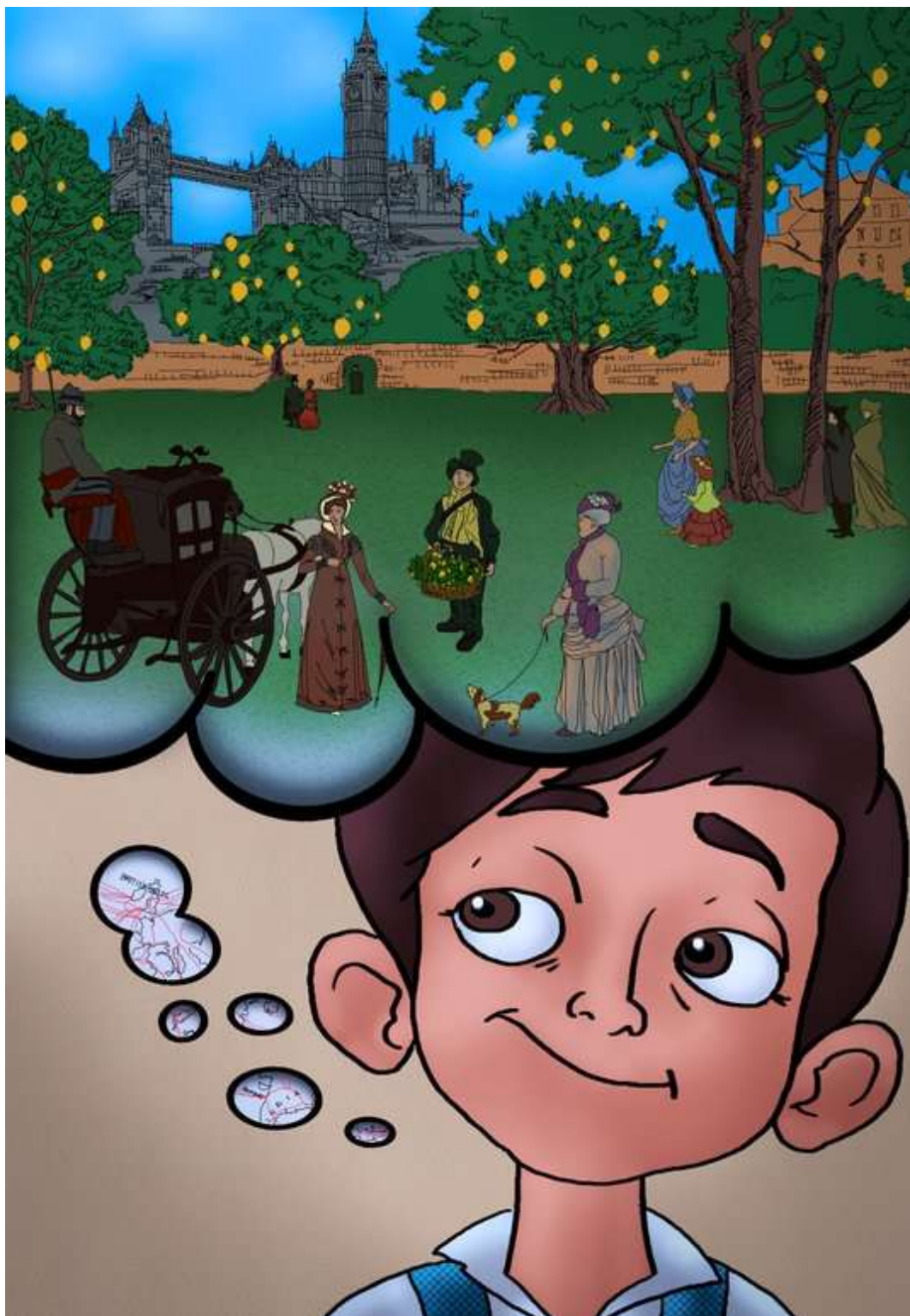
“Well, he helped her find a magic mango seed!”



"One day, when great-grandfather was around five or six years old, he heard his parents discuss a most extraordinary piece of news they had just read in the newspaper."

"The newspaper we found!" interrupted Arun.

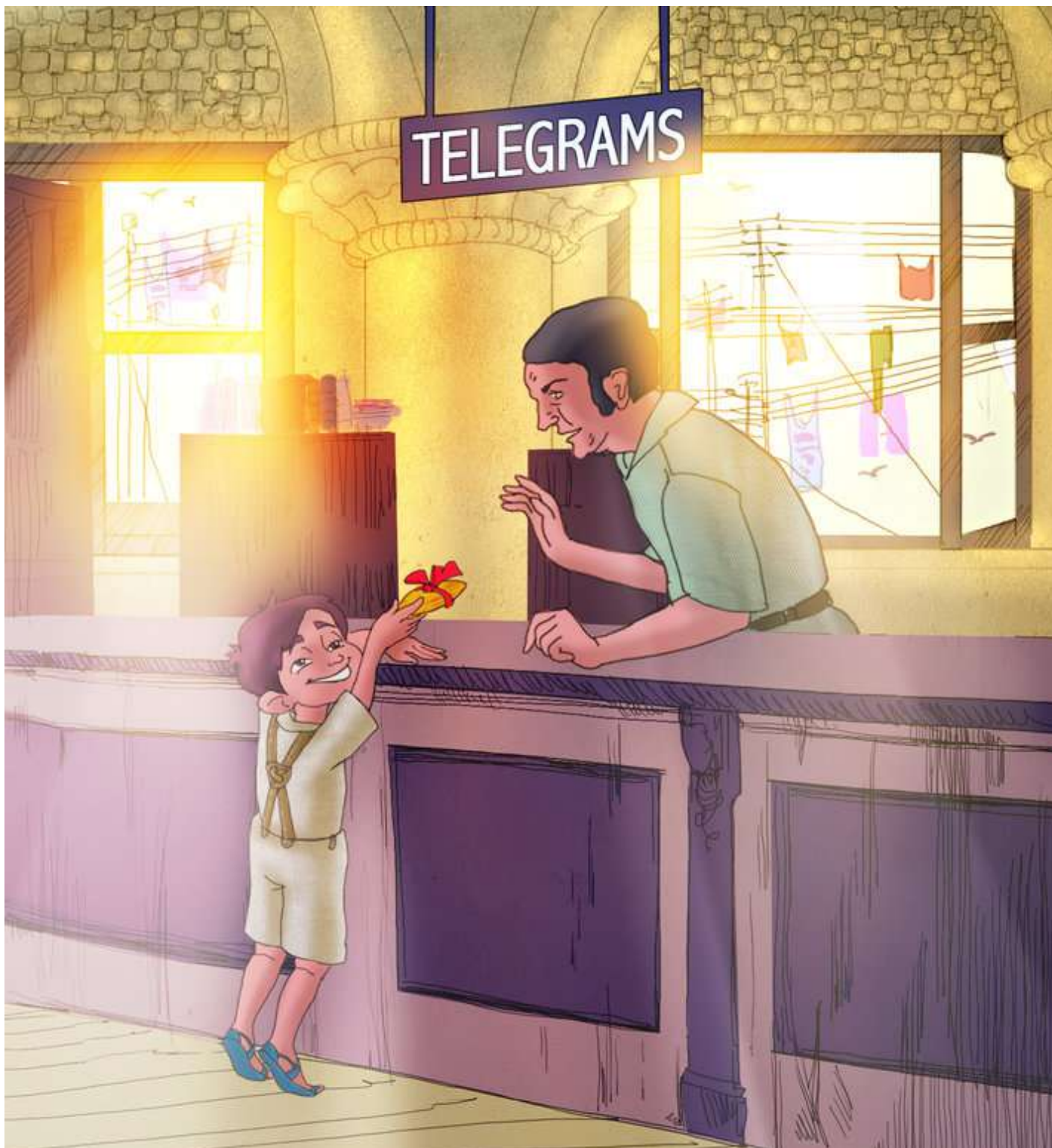
"Yes, that one. A little girl who lived in this big city called London had sent a letter to the newspaper asking for help to find a magic mango seed! The news agencies picked up her message and telegraphed it to all corners of the world. It was even published in the *Times of India* in Bombay."



“Great-grandfather wasn’t quite sure where London was or why people in London didn’t grow their own mangoes. Nor was he quite sure how one could send messages by electric telegraph. But that evening he decided he would help that little girl to find a magic mango seed.”

“The problem,” *dadi* went on, “was that he had no idea where to find such a thing. There were plenty of mango trees around, all magical in their own right...”

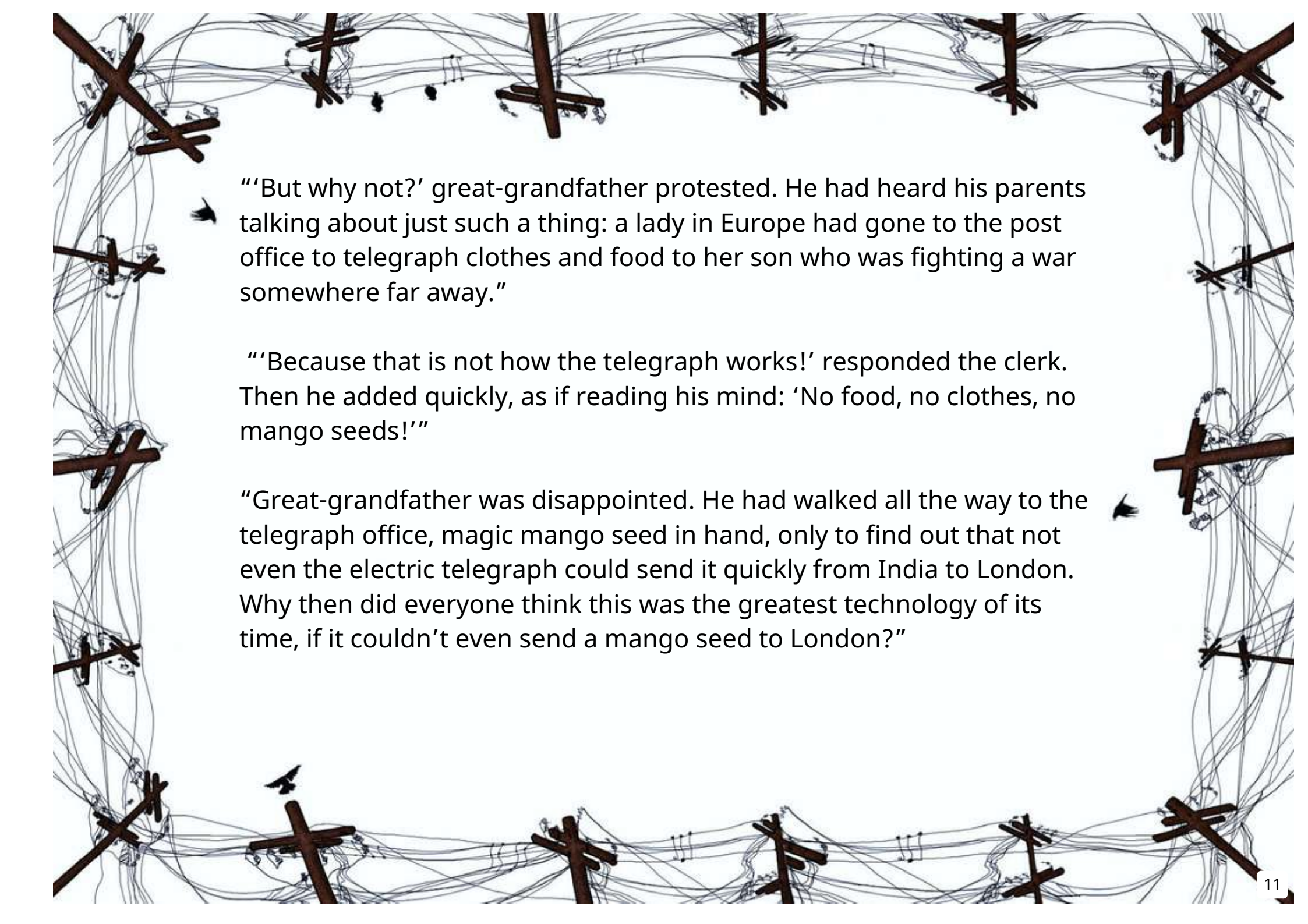
“So he decided to send the little girl a seed from his own garden. A seed from a beautiful mango tree, whose canopy used to protect the children from the scorching heat of summer. And its fruit... ah, its fruit was truly magical!”



"The next day, great-grandfather walked to the Telegraph Office, one mango seed in hand."

"‘I want to telegraph this seed to London,’ he told the telegraph clerk boldly, holding out his hand."

"The man laughed loudly. ‘You cannot send a seed by electric telegraph! You have to send it by post. Of course, it will take much longer to reach London!’"



“‘But why not?’ great-grandfather protested. He had heard his parents talking about just such a thing: a lady in Europe had gone to the post office to telegraph clothes and food to her son who was fighting a war somewhere far away.”

“‘Because that is not how the telegraph works!’ responded the clerk. Then he added quickly, as if reading his mind: ‘No food, no clothes, no mango seeds!’”

“Great-grandfather was disappointed. He had walked all the way to the telegraph office, magic mango seed in hand, only to find out that not even the electric telegraph could send it quickly from India to London. Why then did everyone think this was the greatest technology of its time, if it couldn’t even send a mango seed to London?”



"The clerk tried to cheer him up. 'You can't send a seed by telegraph, but you can do other things. You can send messages. Or music. Or play chess. The words you choose to send will be converted into electric signals, and these will travel through the telegraph wires across many lands and seas until they reach London.'"

"Here, I'll write your message on this piece of paper, and send it on its way with the help of this instrument. The message must be short and clear, otherwise it will be expensive."



"I guess... I guess you are right. I will send the seed by post and send a message by telegraph to say that I have sent the seed by post."

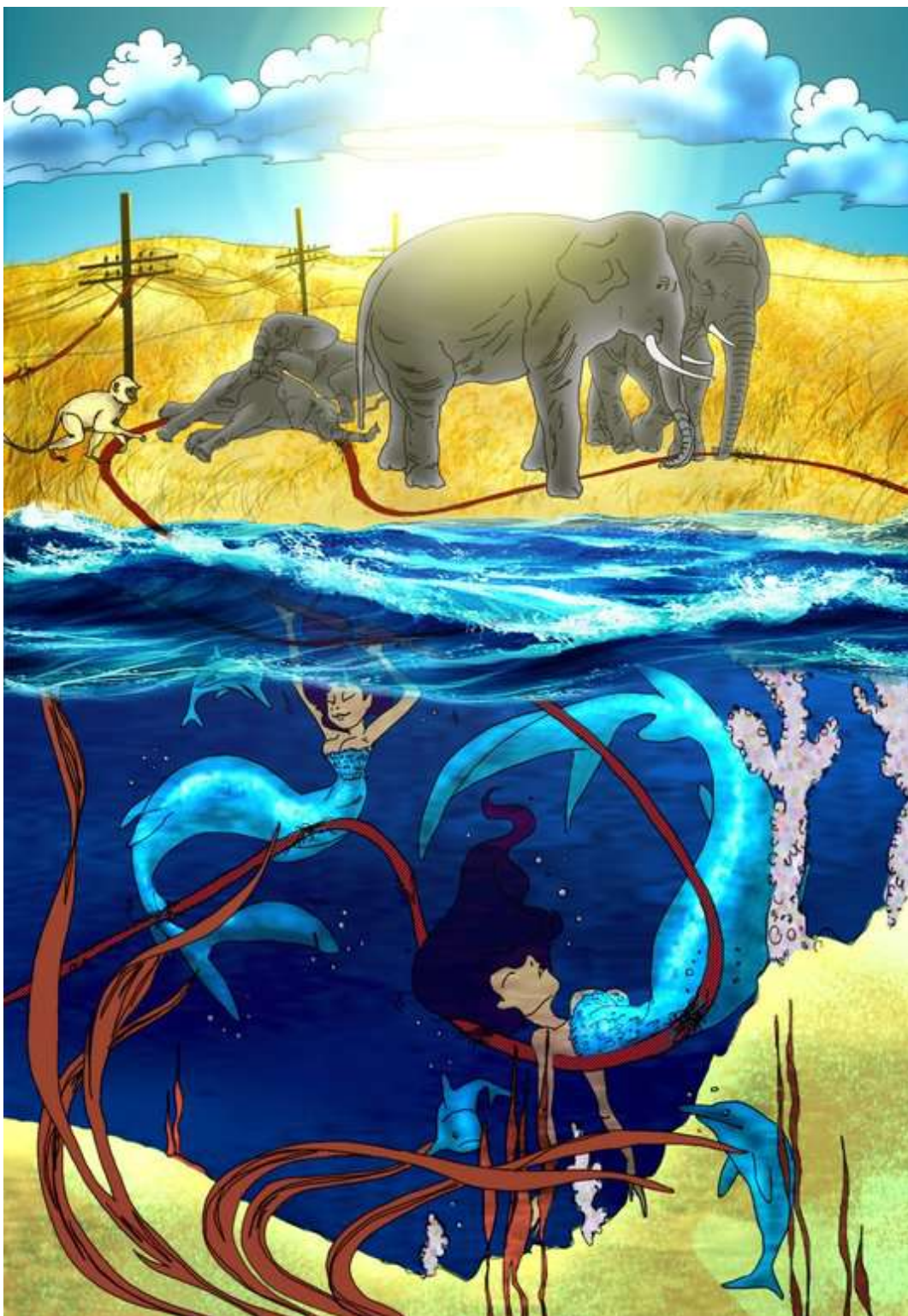
"‘That sounds about right,’ said the clerk, visibly relieved. Then, sitting down at his desk, he began to tap rhythmically the knob of his instrument: ‘Magic mango seed to arrive by post from India. Please confirm receipt.’"

"The message is on its way now. From Bombay it will cross the Arabian Sea to Aden, at the tip of the Arabian Peninsula, through a submarine cable. It will then travel through Egypt, Malta and Gibraltar, and when it reaches Britain, my colleague in London will see lots of dots and dashes printed on a paper slip..."



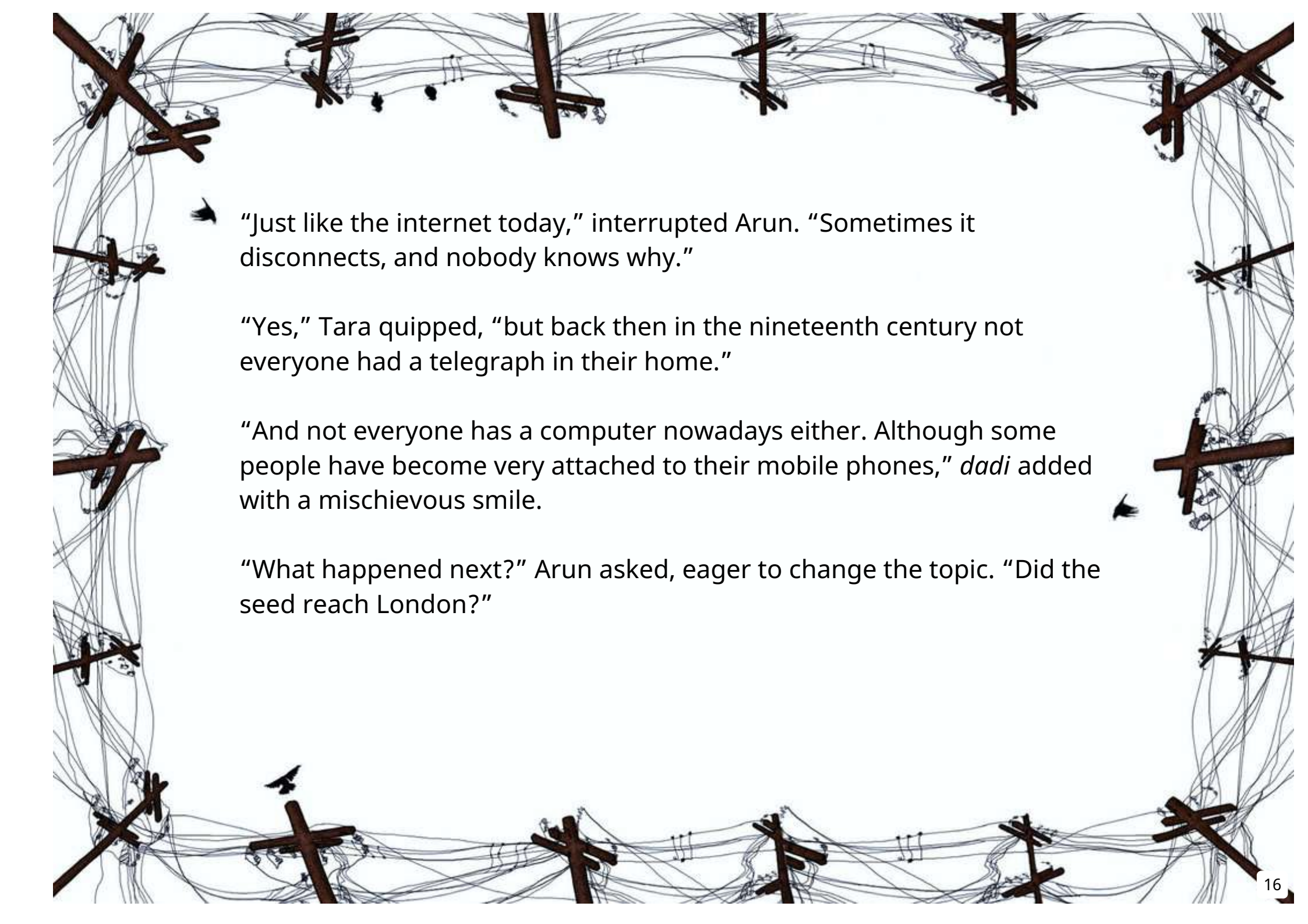
"Dots and dashes? But how will people understand my message then?"

"'Hehe,' said the clerk, 'don't you worry about that! Our telegraphists are trained to decipher even the most mysterious of messages. They know exactly how many dots and dashes are used to represent each letter of the alphabet. They can even understand the message when they hear the clicks of this instrument!'"



“‘But what if the message gets lost on the way?’ great-grandfather insisted. This seemed like an awfully long way for his message to travel—surely, something would go wrong.”

“Well, no technology is perfect. Sometimes messages do get lost on the way. There might be an accident, if a passing ship cuts the underwater cable with its anchor. Or the cable might snap under the weight of the barnacles and corals which have grown on it. Land cables are sometimes destroyed by storms and wild animals. But our engineers try to repair them as fast as possible so that people can keep on sending their messages from one corner of the world to the other.”



"Just like the internet today," interrupted Arun. "Sometimes it disconnects, and nobody knows why."

"Yes," Tara quipped, "but back then in the nineteenth century not everyone had a telegraph in their home."

"And not everyone has a computer nowadays either. Although some people have become very attached to their mobile phones," *dadi* added with a mischievous smile.

"What happened next?" Arun asked, eager to change the topic. "Did the seed reach London?"



"Yes, it did, and so did the telegram. The little girl planted the seed in her garden and waited for it to grow. She waited and waited, and waited still, but it did not grow into a tree. At least not as fast as a magic tree should have—just as she had seen it grow at a show in London. A famous magician, recently returned from his tour of India, had performed the magic mango trick for them."

"The magic mango trick?"

"Well, yes, that famous trick performed by street magicians since olden times. They make a mango tree grow from a seed in no time at all. I saw it myself a couple of times."

"That explains it then!" said Arun cheerfully.

"Yes," nodded Tara thoughtfully. "It takes years to grow a tree. Even a magic mango tree."





DID YOU KNOW?

In India, the **electric telegraph** was open to the public in 1855, while Britain and the United States were connected by a transatlantic cable in 1866. The new technology was used by the British colonial administration, merchants and the general public for various types of communications. Newspapers and news agencies like Reuters also used the telegraph regularly to transmit news from India and other parts of the world.

Messages were sent with the help of pulses of electric current of two different lengths—dots and dashes. Different combinations of dots and dashes represented different letters and numbers. Telegraph operators were trained to recognize the sound or “clicks” of their instruments as they received these dots and dashes and could thus “read” messages by ear. Later, instruments also printed the dots and dashes on a long piece of paper known as ticker tape. To pass the time, telegraph operators sometimes chatted or even played chess with their colleagues thousands of miles away through the electric wires.



DID YOU KNOW?

In the nineteenth century, the **mango trick** was one of the most famous tricks performed by Indian street magicians and was often described in European accounts of travel to India. The magician planted a seed in the ground, watered it and covered it with a basket, repeating this performance a few times until the seed grew into a small tree which even had fruit on it.

The mango tree also featured in riddles, like this one, which was published in a children's magazine in Britain:

“What’s the haughty tree giving command?

Answer: Mango (Man, go!)”



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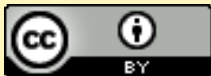
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The Magic Mango

(English)

One day, Tara and Arun discover an old newspaper in their grandmother's attic. They open it and embark on a historical adventure about a magic mango seed and a little boy who tried to telegraph it from India to London.

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



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